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Through the Mill

by Al Priddy

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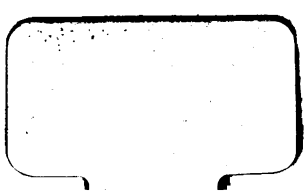

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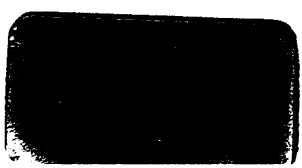

THEN THE EPILEPTIC OCTOGENARIAN LET ME GO AND THE PAUPER LINE WENT IN BEFORE THE PARISH CLERK FOR THE CHARITY SHILLING

THROUGH THE MILL

THE LIFE OF A MILL-BOY

BY

AL PRIDDY

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
WLADYSLAW T. BENDA

THE PILGRIM PRESS
BOSTON NEW YORK CHICAGO

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Affectionately Dedicated

TO

MY WIFE

"Still, all day, the iron wheels go onward,
Grinding life down from its mark;
And the children's souls, which God is calling sunward,
Spin on blindly in the dark."

—E. B. Browning

Note

How many thousand pens are busy reporting and recording mill life! It is a splendid commentary on the fineness of our social conscience that there are so many champions on behalf of overworked boys and girls.

Coming now, to take its place among the multitudes of investigations and faithful records of factory life, is this frank, absolutely real and dispassionate Autobiography—written by a mill boy who has lived the experiences of this book. So far as can be found this is the *first time that such an Autobiography has been printed in English.*

Since its appearance in the Outlook, the Autobiography has been entirely rewritten and new chapters have been added, so that the book will be practically new to any one who chanced to read the Outlook chapters.

Contents

CHAPTER I — PAGE

A Mixture of Fish, Wrangles, and Beer 3

CHAPTER II

Dripping Potatoes, Diplomatic Charity, and Christmas Carols 27

CHAPTER III

My Schoolmates Teach Me American 47

CHAPTER IV

I Pick Up a Handful of America, make an American Cap, whip a Yankee, and march Home Whistling "Yankee Doodle" 59

CHAPTER V

I cannot become a President, but I can go to the Dumping Grounds 67

CHAPTER VI

The Luxurious Possibilities of the Dollar-Down-Dollar-a-Week-System of Housekeeping 81

CHAPTER VII

I am given the Privilege of Choosing my own Birthday . . 93

CHAPTER VIII

The Keepers of the Mill Gate, Snuff Rubbing, and the Play of a Brute 113

CHAPTER IX

A Factory Fashion-plate, the Magic Shirt Bosom, and Wise Counsel on How To Grow Straight 129

CONTENTS

CHAPTER X — PAGE

"Peter One-Leg-and-a-Half" and His Optimistic Whistlers 141

CHAPTER XI

Esthetic Adventures made possible by a Fifteen-Dollar Piano 149

CHAPTER XII

Machinery and Manhood 165

CHAPTER XIII

How my Aunt and Uncle Entertained the Spinners . . . 179

CHAPTER XIV

Bad Deeds in a Union for Good Works 191

CHAPTER XV

The College Graduate Scrubber Refreshes my Ambitions . 205

CHAPTER XVI

How the Superintendent Shut Us Out from Eden . . . 223

CHAPTER XVII

I Founded the Priddy Historical Club 233

CHAPTER XVIII

A Venture into Art 243

CHAPTER XIX

A Reduction in Wages, Cart-tail Oratory, a Big Strike, and the Joys and Sufferings Thereof 255

CHAPTER XX

My Steam Cooker goes wrong, I go to Newport for Enlistment on a Training-ship 265

CHAPTER XXI

The Ichabod of Mule-rooms, some Drastic Musing, College at my Finger-tips, the Mill People wait to let me pass and I Am Waved into the World by a Blind Woman 273

Illustrations

THEN THE EPILEPTIC OCTOGENARIAN LET ME GO AND THE PAUPER LINE WENT IN BEFORE THE PARISH CLERK FOR THE CHARITY SHILLING . . . . . *Frontispiece*

FACING PAGE

WHEN THE TRAIN STARTED FOR LIVERPOOL, I COUNTED MY PENNIES WHILE MY AUNT WEPT BITTERLY 52

PAT AND TIM LED ME TO THE CHARLES STREET DUMPING GROUND — WHICH WAS THE NEIGHBORHOOD GEHENNA 78

I WAS GIVEN A BROOM, AND THEN I FOUND MYSELF ALONE WITH MARY 122

"PETER-ONE-LEG-AND-A-HALF" LED US AT NIGHT OVER HIGH BOARD FENCES 146

THE SPINNERS WOULD NOT STOP THEIR MULES WHILE I CLEANED THE WHEELS 170

HE PLUCKED THE VENERABLE BEARD OF A SOMNOLENT HEBREW 196

THE GANG BEGAN TO HOLD "SURPRISE PARTIES" FOR THE GIRLS IN THE MILL 246

THROUGH THE MILL

Chapter I. A Mixture of Fish, Wrangles, and Beer

THROUGH THE MILL

Chapter I. A Mixture of Fish, Wrangles, and Beer

MY tenth birthday was celebrated in northern England, almost within hailing distance of the Irish Sea. Chaddy Ashworth, the greengrocer's son, helped me eat the birthday cake, with the ten burnt currants on its buttered top.

As old Bill Scroggs was wont to boast: "Hadfield was in the right proper place, it being in the best shire in the Kingdom. Darby-shir (Derbyshire) is where Mr. George Eliot (only he said 'Helliot') got his 'Adam Bede' frum (only he said 'Hadam Bede'). Darby-shir is where Hum-fry Ward (he pronounced it 'Waard') placed the 'Histry o' Davvid Grieve.' If that don't top off the glory, it is Darby-shir that has geen to the waarld Florence Nightengale, Hangel of the British Harmy!"

It was in the first of those ten years that I had been bereft of my parents and had gone to live with my Aunt Millie and Uncle Stanwood. In commenting on her benevolence in taking me, Aunt Millie often said: "If it had been that none of my own four babbies had died, I don't know what you'd have done, I'm sure. I shouldn't have taken you!"

But there I was, a very lucky lad indeed to have a home with a middle-class tradesman in Station Road. My uncle's property consisted of a corner shop and an adjoining house. The door of the shop looked out upon the main, cobbled thoroughfare, and upon an alleyway which ended at a coffin-maker's, where all the workhouse coffins were manufactured. We passed back and forth to the shop through a low, mysterious door, which in "The Mysteries of Udolpho" would have figured in exciting, ghostly episodes, so was it hidden in darkness in the unlighted storeroom from which it led. As for the shop itself, it was a great fish odor, for its counters, shelves and floor had held nothing else for years and years. The poultry came only in odd seasons, but fish was always with us: blue mussels, scalloped cockles, crabs and lobsters, mossy mussels, for shell fish: sole, conger eels, haddock, cod, mackerel, herring, shrimps, flake and many other sorts for the regu-

lar fish. Then, of course, there were the smoked kind: bloaters, red herrings, kippered herring, finnan haddock, and salt cod. In the summer the fish were always displayed outside, with ice and watercresses for their beds, on white platters. Then, too, there were platters of opened mussels a little brighter than gold in settings of blue. My uncle always allowed me to cut open the cod so that I might have the fishhooks they had swallowed. There was not a shopkeeper in the row that had half as much artistic window display skill as had Uncle Stanwood. He was always picking up "pointers" in Manchester. When the giant ray came in from Grimsby, the weavers were always treated to a window display twice more exciting than the butcher offered every Christmas, when he sat pink pigs in chairs in natural human postures, their bodies glorified in Christmas tinsel. Uncle Stanwood took those giant fish, monstrous, slimy, ugly nightmares, sat them in low chairs, with tail-flappers curled comically forward, with iron rimmed spectacles on their snouts, a dented derby aslant beady eyes, and a warden's clay pipe prodded into a silly mouth — all so clownish a sight that the weavers and spinners never tired of laughing over it.

But while Uncle Stanwood was ambitious enough in his business, seeking "independence,"

which, to the British tradesman, represents freedom from work and therefore, "gentlemanliness," though he knew the fine art of window-display and was a good pedler, he was never intended by nature to impress the world with the fact of his presence in it. He lacked will power. He was not self-assertive enough at critical times. The only time when he did call attention to himself was when he took "Bob," our one-eyed horse, and peddled fish, humorously shouting through the streets, "Mussels and cockles alive! Buy 'em alive! Kill 'em as you want 'em!" At all other times, the "Blue Sign" and the "Linnet's Nest," our public houses, could lure him away from his business very readily. Uncle Stanwood had a conspicuous artistic nature and training, and it was in these public houses where he could display his talents to the best advantage. He could play a flute and also "vamp" on a piano. True his flute-playing was limited to "Easy Pieces," and his piano "vamping" was little more than playing variations on sets of chords in all the various keys, with every now and then a one-finger-air, set off very well by a vamp, but he could get a perfunctory morsel of applause for whatever skill he had, and very few of the solo singers in concerts attempted to entertain in those public houses without having "Stan"

Brindin "tickle it up" for them. In regard to his piano-playing, uncle had unbounded confidence. He could give the accompaniment to the newest ballad without much difficulty. The singer would stand up before the piano and say, "Stan, hast' 'eard that new piece, just out in t' music 'alls, 'The Rattling Seaman?'"

"No," uncle would say, "but I know I can 'vamp' it for thee, Jud. Hum it o'er a bar or two. What key is't in?" "I don't know *key*," would respond the singer, "but it goes like this," and there would ensue a humming during which uncle would desperately finger his set of chords, cocking his ear to match the piano with the singer's notes, and the loud crash of a fingerful of notes would suddenly indicate that connections had been made. Then, in triumph, uncle would say, "Let me play the Introduction, Jud!" and with remarkable facility he would stir the new air into the complex variations of his chords; he would "vamp" up and down, up and down, while the singer cleared his throat, smiled on the audience, and arranged his tie. Then pianist and singer, as much together as if they had been practising for two nights, would go together through a harmonious recital of how:

"The Rattling Seaman's jolly as a friar,
As jolly as a friar is he, he, he."

After the song, and the encore that was sure to follow, were done, uncle always had to share the singer's triumph in the shape of noggins of punch, and mugs of porter, into which a red hot poker from the coals had been stirred, and seasoned with pepper and salt. This would be repeated so many times in an evening that uncle soon became unfit for either piano or flute-playing, and I generally had to go for the flute the next morning before I went to school.

Uncle Stanwood had a golden age to which he often referred. In the first place, as a young bachelor he had traveled like a gentleman. His tour had included Ireland, France, and the Isle of Man. This was before he had learned to play a flute and piano and when public houses were religiously abhorred. He was always repeating an experience that befell him in Ireland. I can record it verbatim. "I was walking along through a little hamlet when night came on. I saw one of them sod houses, and I knocked on the door. A blinking Irish woman asked me what I wanted. I told her, 'a night's lodging.' She pointed to a far corner in the sod house where a pig and some hens lay, and said to me, 'Ye can dossy down in the corner wid th' rist of the fam'ly!'" In its time there was no more vivid story that caught my imagination than that —pig, hens, and blinking Irish woman. About

his Isle of Man experiences, uncle was always eloquent. Besides all else he had a ditty about it, to the accompaniment of which he often dandled me on his knee.

"Aye, oh, aye! Lissen till I tell you
Who I am, am, am.
I'm a rovin' little darkey
All the way from Isle of Man.
I'm as free as anybody,
And they call me little Sam!"

Previous to his marriage, also, he had been the teacher of a very large young men's class in one of the churches. That was his proudest boast, because, as explained to me over and over again in after years, "It was that work as a teacher that made me read a lot of mighty fine books. I had to prepare myself thoroughly, for those young fellows were reading philosophy, religion, and the finest fiction. I had to keep ahead of them in some way. It is to that work that I owe what little learnin' I've got."

The inclinations toward the finer, sweeter things of life were wrapped up in uncle's character, but his will was not strong enough to keep him away from the public house.

"That's my downfall," he said. "Oh, if I'd not learned to play the flute and the piano!" His art was his undoing; but never did his

undoing smother his golden age. When almost incoherently drunk it was his habit to whimper, "I was better once — I was. I taught a young men's class. Look at me now!"

It always seemed to me that Aunt Millie was overstocked with the things that uncle lacked — will-power, assertiveness, and electric temper. She was positively positive in every part of her nature. She was positive that "Rule Britannia" should come next after "Nearer, my God, to Thee!" She was likewise positive as to the validity of her own ideas. Her mind, once made up — it did not take very long for that — was inflexible. The English landed nobility never had a more worshipful worshiper than my aunt. She was positive that it was one of our chief duties to "know our place," and "not try to be gentlemen and ladies when we don't have the right to be such." "It's no use passing yourself off as middle-classers if you arn't middle classers and why should, on the other hand, a middle-classer try to pose as a gentleman?"

She was always reciting to me, as one of the pleasant memories she had carried off from her girlhood, how, when the carriage of a squire had swept by, she had courtesied graciously and humbly.

"Did they bow to you, Aunt?" I asked.

"Bow to me!" she exclaimed, contemptuously,

"who ever heard the likes!" Once she had seen a *real* lord! Her father had been one of those hamlet geniuses whose dreams and plans never get much broader recognition than his own fireside. He had built church organs, played on them, and had composed music. He had also made the family blacking, soap, ink, and many other useful necessities. He had also manufactured the pills with which the family cured its ills, pills of the old-fashioned sort of soap, sugar, and herb, compounded. Once he had composed some music for his church's share in a national fête, on the merit of which, my aunt used to fondly tell me, *real* gentlemen would drive up to the door merely to have a glimpse at the old gentleman, much as if he had been Mendelssohn in retirement.

Aunt sent me daily to one or other of the public houses for either a jug of ale or a pint of porter. Sometimes she took more than a perfunctory jug, and then she was on edge for a row instantly. When intoxicated she fairly quivered with jealousy, suspicion, and violent passion. One question touching on a delicate matter, one word injudiciously placed, one look of the eye, and she became a volcano of belligerent rage, belching profanity, and letting crockery or pieces of coal express what even her overloaded adjectives could not adequately convey. And

when the storm had spent itself, she always relapsed into an excessive hysteria, which included thrillingly mad shrieks, which my poor, inoffensive uncle tried to drown in showers of cold water.

"I've brought it all on myself," explained Uncle Stanwood, in explanation of his wife's intoxication. He then went on to explain how, when he had been courting, he had taken his fiancée on a holiday trip to the seaside. While there, in a beer-garden, he had pressed her to drink a small glass of brandy. "It all started from that," he concluded. "God help me!"

He certainly had to pay excessive interest on that investment, for if ever a mild man was nagged, or if ever a patient man had his temper tried, it was Uncle Stanwood. By my tenth birthday the house walls were no longer echoing with peace, for there were daily tirades of wrath and anger about the table.

These family rows took many curious turns. In them my aunt, well read in Dickens, whose writings were very real and vivid to her, freely drew from that fiction master's gallery of types, and fitted them to uncle's character. "Don't sit there a-rubbin' your slimy hands like Uriah Heep!" she would exclaim; or, "Yes, there you go, always and ever a-sayin' that something's bound to turn up, you old Micawber, you!"

But this literary tailoring was not at all one-sided, for uncle was even better read than his wife, and with great effect he could say, "Yes, there you go, always insinuatin' everlastingly, like Becky Sharp," and the drive was superlatively effective in that uncle well knew that Thackeray's book was aunt's favorite. I heard him one day compare his wife to Mrs. Gamp, loving her nip of ale overmuch, and on another occasion she was actually included among Mrs. Jarley's wax-works!

There was a curious streak of benevolence in my aunt's nature, a benevolence that concerned itself more with strangers than with those in her own home. I have seen her take broths and meats to neighbors, when uncle and I have had too much buttered bread and preserves. I have seen her take her apron with her to a neighbor's, where she washed the dishes, while her own had to accumulate, to be later disposed of with my assistance. There was a shiftless man in the town, the town-crier, who would never take charity outright. Him did aunt persuade to come and paint rural scenes, highly colored with glaring tints, as if nature had turned color-blind. There were cows in every scene, and aunt noticed that all the cows were up to their knees in water. Not one stood clear on the vivid green hills.

"Torvey," she remarked to the old man,

"why do you always put the cows in water?" The old artist responded, "It's this way, Mrs. Brindin, you see, ma'am, I never learnt to paint 'oofs!" As a further benevolence towards this same man, she kept on hand a worn-out clock, for him to earn a penny on. After each tinkering the clock was never known to run more than a few minutes after the old man had left. But aunt only laughed over it, and called Torvey "summat of a codger, to be sure!"

I attended a low brick schoolhouse which in spring and summer time was buried in a mass of shade, with only the tile chimneys free from a coat of ivy. The headmaster gave us brief holidays, when he had us run races for nuts. In addition to the usual studies I was taught darning, crocheting, plain sewing, and knitting. Every Monday morning I had to take my penny for tuition.

Outside of school hours there were merry times, scraping sparks on the stone flags with the irons of our clogs, going to the butcher's every Tuesday morning, at the slaughter-house, where he gave us bladders to blow up and play football with; and every now and then he would ask us to lay hold of the rope and help in felling a bull across the block. The only apple I ever saw growing in England hung over a brick wall in a nest of leaves — a red crab no bigger than

a nutmeg. I used to visit that wall with my companions, but not to try for that apple — it was too sacred in our eyes for that — but to admire it, as it bent up and down in the wind, and to wonder how many more were inside the wall among the larger branches. On Saturdays, after I had brightened the stone hearth with blue-stone and sand, I went out to greet the Scotch bag-piper who, with his wheezy pibroch, puffed out like a roasted Christmas goose, perambulated down our road so sedately that the feather in his plaid bonnet never quivered. As this did not take up all the morning, we borrowed bread-knives from our families, and went to the fields, where we dug under the sod, amongst the fresh, damp soil, for groundnuts, while the soaring lark dropped its sweet note down on us.

But the gala days were the holidays, filled as only the English know how to fill them with high romance and pure fun. There were the Sunday-school "treats," when we went to the fields in holiday clothes and ran, leaped, and frolicked for prize cricket balls and bats, and had for refreshment currant buns and steaming coffee. There was the week at the seashore, when aunt and uncle treated me to a rake, shovel, and colored tin pail, for my use on the shore in digging cockles, making sand mountains, and in erecting pebble breastworks to keep back the

tide. To cap all else as a gala opportunity, full of color, noise, music, and confusion, came Glossop Fair, to which I went in a special train for children. There I dodged between the legs of a bow-legged, puffy old man to keep up with the conductor of our party, and I spent several pennies on shallow glasses filled with pink ices, which I licked with such assiduity that my tongue froze at the third consecutive glass. I was always given pennies enough to be able to stop at the stalls to buy a sheep's trotter, with vinegar on it; to eat a fried fish, to get a bag of chipped potatoes, delicious sticks of gold, covered with nice-tasting grease, and to buy a Pan's pipe, a set of eight-reed whistles on which, though I purchased several sets, I was never able to attain to the dignity and the thrill of so simple a tune as "God Save the Queen." The grand climax of the fair, the very *raison d'être*, were the fairy shows, held under dirty canvases, with red-nosed barkers snapping worn whips on lurid canvases whereon were pictured: "Dick Whittington and His Cat," at the famous milestone, with a very impressionistic London town in the haze, but inevitable for Dick and His Cat; or "Jack and the Beanstalk," showing a golden-haired prince in blue tights and a cloud of a giant reaching out a huge paw to get the innocent youth and cram him down his cavernous maw.

"'Ere you are, Ladies and Gents!" screamed the barker, pattering nervously and significantly on these pictures, Only 'riginal 'Dick Whittington and His Cat,' Lord Mayor o' Lunnon! Grown ups a penny, childer 'arf price! Step up all! The band will play! 'Ere you are, now! Tickets over there!"

My tenth birthday marked the end of my boyish, merry play-life. Over its threshold I was to meet with and grasp the calloused hand of Labor. Not the labor which keeps a healthy lad from mischief or loafing, not the labor of mere thrift, but the more forbidding form of it; the labor from which strong men cringe in dread, the labor from which men often seek escape by self-inflicted death, the labor of sweat, of tears, of pitiless autocracy — the labor of Necessity! And necessity, which is not induced by reasonable and excusable circumstances, nor is the result of a mere mistaken judgment of events, such as comes through unskilled business acumen or an overconfidence in a friend's advice, but the necessity which is rooted in carelessness, squandering, drunkenness.

For in that tenth year of my life, what had appeared to be the strong walls of my uncle's house collapsed utterly. The undermining had been unseen, unthought of. In that year the parlors of the "Linnet's Nest" and "The Blue Sign"

saw more of my uncle than they had previously. His piano-playing and his flute solos formed an almost continuous performance from early afternoon until late at night. When he started out to peddle his fish, he would stop Bob in front of the "Linnet's Nest" and forget his customers until I went and reminded him. The public house tills began to draw the money that came to uncle's from his peddling, his shop, and the interest from his bank account. But the money loss was trivial in comparison with the loss of what little business initiative or inclination he had possessed. He soon became unfit to order fish from Manchester. His former customers could not depend upon him. Uncle Stanwood had become a confirmed drunkard.

Previous to this, in spite of the incompatibility of temper between uncle and aunt, there had always been a little breath of peace around our fender, but now it fled, and the house was filled with nervous bickerings, hiccoughs, and piggish snortings. The temple of man that had been so imperfectly built was henceforth profaned. The fluent words passed, and an incoherent gurgle took their place. The intelligent gleam grew dim in those sad grey eyes. The firm strides which had indicated not a little pride became senile, tottering, childish. There was written over the lintels of our door: "Lost, A Man."

All this was not one thousandth part so serious to the creditors who clamored for their pay as it was to aunt and me. To see that slouching, dull-eyed, slavering creature cross the kitchen threshold and tumble in a limp heap on the sanded floor was a sword-thrust that started deep, unhealing wounds. The man and boy changed places, suddenly. That strange, huddled, groping creature, helpless on the couch, his muddy shoes daubing the clothes, was not the uncle I had known. I seemed to have no uncle. I had lost him, indeed, and now had to take his place as best I could. Aunt tried her best, with my help, to keep the business going, but the task was beyond us, as we plainly saw.

But uncle fought battles in his effort to master himself. He strained his will to its utmost; postulated morning after morning intentions of "bracing up"; took roundabout routes with his cart to avoid the public houses, left his purse at home, sent aunt to Manchester to buy the fish so that he would not have that temptation, took me with him to remind him of his promises, even sent word to the "Blue Sign" and the "Linnet's Nest" to give him no more credit, and signed the pledge; but the compelling thirst would not be tamed. To take a roundabout route in the morning only meant that he would tie up his horse at the "Blue Sign" lamp-post on his way

back; to send aunt to Manchester only meant that, with her out of the way, he had a clear road to the "Linnet's Nest." When I went with him, as a moral mentor, he bribed me with a penny to get me out of the way. Sometimes he left me waiting for him until I grew so miserable that I drove home alone. As uncle was a good customer, the public houses only smiled when he sent word to them not to give him credit; they were not in the business of sobering customers.

So it was a losing fight all the way. Uncle was a coward in full retreat. He blamed nobody but himself; in *that* he was not a coward. In his sober moments there was a new and discouraging note in his voice. He echoed the language of those who fail. He met me with an ashamed face. He looked furtively at me, just as a guilty man would look on one he had deeply wronged. His shoulders stooped, as do the shoulders of a man who for the first time carries a heavy burden of shame.

Aunt Millie, in attempting to mend matters, unfortunately used the wrong method. She antagonized her husband, sometimes beyond mortal patience. She generally waited until my uncle was sober, and then let loose vituperative storms that fell with crashing force on his spirit. She was mistress of the vocabulary of invective; the stinging word, the humiliating,

the maddening word was instant on her lips. She did not have her word once and for all. If she had, it would probably have saved matters; but she kept up a steady stream of abuse through out the time uncle was in the house. Often he was planning for a night of home when his wife would unload the full burden of her ire on him; and if only for quietness, he would leave the house altogether and find solace in the noggins and mugs.

As an onlooker, and though a mere lad, I saw that my aunt was taking the wrong course, and every now and then, like a Greek chorus at the tragedy, I would remonstrate with her, "Why don't you let him alone when he wants to stay at home? You've driven him off when he was not going out, aunt!"

"You clown!" she would storm, "mind your place and manners before I turn on you and give you a taste of the strap!"

After that it became my custom, whenever uncle was getting a tongue-lashing, to say to him, in a whisper, "Don't mind her, uncle. Don't leave the house. She doesn't know what she's saying!" In secret, uncle would say to me, "It's more than flesh and blood can stand, Al, this constant nagging. I'd not be half so much away in the public houses if she'd let me have a peaceful time at home."

Indeed, my uncle, intoxicated was five times more agreeable than was his wife when angered. She herself was drinking mildly, and every sup of ale fired her temper until it burned at white heat. All the bulldog of the British roared and yelped in her then. If contradicted by my uncle or me, she threw the first thing to hand, saucer, knife, or loaf. So fearful was I that murder would ensue, that several times I whispered to my uncle to go off to the "Linnet's Nest" in the interests of peace.

Like the reports of the messengers bringing to Job the full measure of his loss, came market letters from Manchester, unpaid bills from the town merchants, and personal repudiations by my uncle's old customers. We had to solicit credit from the shop-keepers. Failure was on its way.

One spring day in that year Uncle Stanwood came into the house in great excitement. He met my aunt's inquiring remark with, "I'm going to ship for the United States, Millie!"

"Ship your grandaddy!" she retorted. "Been drinking gin this time, eh?"

"I'm sober enough, thank God," replied uncle. "I've borrowed enough money to carry me across. That's the only way I shall ever straighten out and get away from the public houses. It's best; don't you think so, old girl?"

"What about us?" asked my aunt with an angry gleam in her eyes. "What's to become of us?"

"Why," stammered uncle, "you see I must go on ahead and get something to do, first; then I can send for you, Millie. Think what it means for us to get away to America, where are so many bright chances! God knows but I shall be able to lift up my head there, and get a new start. I can't do anything so long as I stay here."

So, after the first shock had passed, it was arranged. For the first time in many days I saw my uncle put his arms around his wife's shoulders, as if he were courting her again, and re-dreaming youth's dream, as he painted with winsome colors this new adventure. When hope was shining its brightest in his eye my aunt's caught the gleam of it, and in a much kinder voice than I was used to hearing, she said, "Do it, Stanwood! Do it, and we'll look after the business while you get ready for us in the new world!"

In another week my uncle had packed his belongings in a tin trunk, had said good-by to his old-time friends, had taken us with him to the station to talk earnestly, manfully with us until the Liverpool train came in. Then we went through the gates to the compartment, and saw him shut in by the guard. Through the

open window he whispered counsel and tender words, and re-echoed his new purposes. Then there was a stir, the train began to move away from us, and my uncle was plunging off towards a new world, and, we prayed, towards a new manhood, leaving aunt and me dazed at our new loneliness.

Chapter II. Dripping Potatoes, Diplomatic Charity, and Christmas Carols

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CONTRARY to his promise, Uncle did not write to us announcing his arrival. In fact, for some strange reason, no letter had arrived by the end of summer. After the leaves had gone and the trees were left stripped by the fall winds, no word had come to comfort us from America.

Aunt and I had tried to keep the shop open, but we saw every day that we had not the skill to make it a success. Already, in the minds of the townspeople, we had failed. It was not long before we were selling nothing but the smoked and dried fish with which the shop was stocked. We could get no fresh fish on credit. Even the grocer would not longer trust us, and shut off supplies. We tried to make out as well as we could, but not philosophically, on dry bread, smoked fish, and tea, with monotonous

regularity. Aunt Millie was the wrong kind of person to live with in reduced circumstances. She took away the taste of a red herring by her complaints and impatient tirades against the author of our misfortune. The failure of letters, too, only increased her anger. There was heated complaint for dessert at every meal. That Scriptural word, "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is," might have meant much to me during those hungry days.

Then our collateral had to go, a piece at a time. Bob, the one-eyed horse, friend of those early years, harnessed to his cart, brought in some money with which we could buy a little fresh stock which I tried to peddle in a hand-cart. But I could not get around very skilfully, and as I trudged over the same route where previously my uncle had gone with his humorous shout of "Mussels alive! Buy 'em alive!" people did not trade with me, but pitied me, and stroked my head in sympathy. When the stock was gone, and it was soon gone, my aunt thought that she had better give up the fight and sell out at auction!

By this time winter was full on us. There were snow and dismal winds which made lonely sounds down our chimney. Old Torvey, the town-crier, was called in for a consultation, and the auction definitely planned. The following

Saturday, in the morning, while the housewives were busy polishing their fenders, Old Torvey, clanging his hand-bell with great unction, came up the middle of the road, stopping at strategic points, and when the aproned housewives and their children stood at their doors alert, he solemnly announced, in his sing-song way: "To—be — sold — at — Public — Auction — this — day—at—two—in—the—afternoon—all—the stock—in—trade—of—Stanwood—Brindin—at—his—shop—at—the—head—of—Station—Road—together—with—all—the—movable—fixtures—therein—and—any—other—items—not—herein—mentioned—Sale—to—begin—sharply—on—time—and—goods—to—go—to—the—highest—bidder—Terms—cash—and—all—bids—welcomed—Come—one—and—all—Two—in—the—afternoon. Now—get—back—to—your—cleaning—before—your—chaps—get—whom!" — this last as a sally for the women, "whom" meaning "home."

All the afternoon, while the auction was in session, aunt and I sat in the parlor of our house, behind the flower-pots, watching all who went in. Aunt kept up a running commentary: "Yes, you go in, too, Jane Harrup. You wouldn't come near me to buy, would you? Um, that blood-sucker, Thompson! What a crowd of vampires a sale can bring out! I didn't think

that you were looking for bargains from us, Martin Comfort. It's beyond me how folks do gather when you are down!"

Then, when the last of the curious crowd had gone and the shop had passed from our control, there came anxious shopmen demanding the settlement of their bills. And when the last item had been paid there was hardly a shilling left. We had merely succeeded in settling the honor of our house.

The next week the town crier once more paraded the streets of the town, announcing: "To—be—sold—at—public—auction—at—two—in—the—afternoon—many—of—the—household—effects—of—Stanwood—Brindin—etc." This time our parlor was stripped of its piano, several ornamental pieces of furniture, and various bric-à-brac. When the bidders had carted away their "bargains," my aunt said to me, "Here is one room less to look after, Al. I suppose I ought to be thankful enough, but I'm not!" After that, we lived entirely in the kitchen.

So, with only a few shillings from the proceeds of the last auction, aunt and I faced the winter. We were buoyed up by the hope that Uncle Stanwood would send us a letter despite his strange silence. But day by day the coal grew less and less in the cellar, the wood was burned up, and the larder needed replenishing.

There came to our ears whispers of gossip that were spreading through the town: that uncle had parted from aunt and would never live with her again, that our financial perplexities were really ten times worse than people imagined, that we should eventually be forced into the workhouse!

Behind that door, which only opened every now and then in answer to a friendly knock, a real battle with poverty was fought. Dry bread and tea (the cups always with thick dregs of swollen, soaked leaves which I used to press with a spoon to extract every possible drop of tea) finally formed the burden of unnourishing meals. Even the tea failed at last, and the bread we ate was very stale indeed. Yet I found dry bread had a good taste when there was nothing else to eat.

It was in the middle of December that Aunt bethought herself of some herring-boxes piled in the garret over the empty shop. She had me split them into kindlings, tie them into penny bundles, and sent me out to peddle them at the doors of our friends. Aunt made me wait until darkness when I first went out with the kindling. She did not want me to be seen in the daylight carrying the wood. That day we had eaten but a breakfast of oat-cake and water, and I was very hungry and impatient to sell some wood that I might have something more to eat. But aunt

was firm, so that it was six o'clock and very dark when I took two penny bundles. The cotton mills had all their lights out. The street-lamps were little dismal spots in the silent streets. Warm glows of light came from front windows, and the shadows of housewives serving supper were seen on many window blinds. My own hunger redoubled. I hurried to the first house on a side street, gave a timid knock, and waited for an answer. A big, rosy-cheeked woman opened the door, and peered down on me, saying, "Where art'?"

"Please, ma'am, if you please," I replied, "I'm Al Priddy, and me and Aunt haven't got anything to eat for tea, and I'm selling bundles of dry wood for a penny apiece."

"Bless 'is little 'eart," exclaimed the big woman. "Bless th' little 'eart! 'is belly's empty, that it is. Come reight in, little Priddy lad, there's waarm teigh(tea) and 'ot buttered crumpets. Sarah Jane," she shouted towards the rear of the house from whence came the tinkle of spoons rattling in cups and a low hum of voices, "get that tu'pence from under th' china shep'erdess on't mantle and bring it reight off. Come in, Priddy, lad, and fill th' belly!"

"If you please, ma'am," I said, "I can't stop, if you please. Aunt Millie hasn't got anything to eat and she's waiting me. I think I'll take

the money, if you please, and be sharp home, thank you!"

"Bless 'is little 'eart," murmured the big woman, "'ere's tuppence 'apenny, an' come ageen, wen tha has't moor wood to sell."

"If you please," I interposed, "it's only tu'pence. I can't take more; aunt said so!"

"Bless 'is 'eart, that's so," said the big woman. "Is th' sure th' won't eat a waarm crumpet, little Priddy, lad?"

I had to refuse again, and clutching the two pennies, I ran exultantly down the road toward home, where aunt was sitting near the very tiny light that a very tiny piece of coal was giving in the big fireplace. With one penny I purchased a warm loaf and with the other I bought some golden treacle, and that night there was not a lord in England whose supper had the taste to it that mine had.

Two days after that, when we were once more without food in the house, and when I had had but a scant breakfast, I met a rough-garbed boy not much older than myself, a homeless waif, known and condemned by the name of "Work 'Ouse Teddy." This day that I met him, he performed his usual feat of wriggling his fingers on his nose, a horrible, silent, swear gesture, and called out to me, "Hey, Fishy, got a cockle on your nose?"

"No," I replied, being secretly afraid of him, "I've not. I'm hungry. I haven't had any dinner."

"Aw, yer got chunks of money, you have, I knows. Don't taffy me like that or I'll squeege yer nose in my thumbs, blast me, I will!" and he made a horrible contortion of his face to frighten me.

"I am hungry!" I protested. "We are poor now, Teddy."

Then I told him all our story, as well as I could, and when I told him about selling the kindling, he laughed and said, "Blow me, you codger! You oughter get your meals like I gets um. Say, now, blokey, wot you say to — well, let's see." and he mused awhile.

Then, "Well, say, wot would yer say to 'taters in gravy, some meat-pie, cold, and a drink of coffee?"

"Oh," I gasped, "that would be rich." Then Teddy winked, a broad, meaningful wink. "I'm yer Daddy, then," and after that, "make a cross over yer 'eart, and say, 'Kill me, skin me, Lord Almighty, if I tell!'" and when I had so sworn, he explained, "Now yer won't let on where I keep things, so come on, blokey, I'm yer Daddy!" and he laughed as merrily as if he did not have to sleep out like a lost sheep of society or to dodge the police, who were ever on his tracks trying to get him put back into the workhouse.

THROUGH THE MILL

Teddy led me through the open gates of the mill-yard when darkness had come on. The firemen, in the glow of their furnaces, called out, cheerily, "Blast th' eyes, Teddy, don't let the boss catch thee!" and, "Got a chew of thick twist(tobacco) for me, Ted, lad?" After he had given the man a chew, and had boxed a round with the other stoker, Teddy came to where I stood, and said, "They let me sleep here nights. They're good blokes. Now, here's where I keeps things." So saying, he led me to a corner of the immense coal heap, and there, in a box amidst thick heaps of coal powder, he drew out a pitcher with the lip gone and only a useless fragment of the handle left. He also drew out a sort of pie plate and a small fruit basket. "I keeps 'em there to keep the dust off," he explained, and handed me the basket. "Now we get ready to eat dripping potatoes and meat-pie, bloke." Then he took me near the furnaces, behind a heap of coal, so that the boss watchman would not find us, and elaborately explained to me the procedure to be followed in getting so tasty a supper.

"When the mill lets out at six, me an' you'll stand there at the gates, you standin' on one side and me on t'ther. You don' be shy, bloke, but speak up, and say, 'Any leavin's, good folks!' 'Give us yer leavin's!' Some on um'll grumble at you, an' some'll say, 'Get off, you bloke, we'll

tell the Bobby,' but they won't. You'll find some that'll open their boxes and turn 'em inside out for you right in the basket. Then you just come over to my side, and I'll show you. Just remember that it's dripping 'taters an' meat-pie an' 'ot coffee! Don't that make yer mouth water, bloke?"

I said that it would be a regular feast.

At six o'clock, when the clang of a big bell in the mill tower let itself out in a riot of din, the whole inside of the factory seemed to run down with a deepening hum, then the quiet precincts of the yards became filled with a chattering, black army. Teddy and I stood on our respective sides of the big gateway, and waited for the exodus. I grew suddenly afraid that I should be trampled under foot, afraid that my voice would not be heard, afraid that I should be jailed. So I let most of the crowd past unsolicited, and then I grew afraid that Teddy would perform all manner of horrible and grewsome tortures on me if I did not try, so I darted my basket almost into the stomach of a tall man, and piped, "Got any leavings, sir?" He paused, looked me over, took the dirty pipe from his mouth as he further extended his contemplation, and said, "Sartinly, lad," and deposited in my basket a currant bun and a slice of cold meat, and went on muttering, "It might be my own, God knows!"

The gas lights were out in the mill, and the huge bulk was merely part of the silent night, when I went across and showed Teddy what I had obtained. He laughed, "Not at all bad — for a learner, that!" he commented. "It takes practice to get dripping 'tato and meat-pie, bloke. I got it and a jug o' coffee. We'll eat near the bilers," and he led the way into the yard, making me dodge behind a pile of boxes as the night watchman came to lock the gates. The firemen allowed Teddy to warm the coffee and the food, and then we sat in the glow of the opening doors, in a bed of coal dust, and ate as sumptuous a meal as had passed my lips for some time.

When I expressed my thanks, Teddy said, "Be on deck to-morrer, too, bloke. It'll be fish then. Would you like fish?"

"I do like fish," I agreed. "I will come to-morrow, Teddy, thank you kindly."

"I'll go to the gate with yer an' give yer a leg o'er. The gate's locked, bloke." After many slips, Teddy at last had me over, and as he said good-night through the pickets, I said, "Will you sleep out in the snow, to-night, Teddy?"

He laughed, "Oh, no, blokey, not me. Wot's the matter with a snooze near the bilers with a cobble o' coal for a piller, eh?" Knowing that

he would be perhaps warmer than I, I left him, and ran home to tell my aunt what a good supper I had picked up.

When I had finished the recital of the adventure, my aunt grew very indignant and gave me a severe whipping with a solid leather strap. "Shamin' me up and down like that!" she cried. "Beggin' at a mill gate! I'll show you!" and I had to swear not to have anything more to do with Work'ouse Teddy.

But evidently through that experience, and on account of my having sold the kindling wood, our friends were at last apprised of the actual poverty in our house, and for a while there seemed to be no end to the little offerings of food that were brought in. I shall always remember with pride the diplomacy with which most of the food was given. When Mrs. Harrup brought in a steaming pigeon-pie, wrapped in a spotless napkin, she said, "Mrs. Brindin, I had more meat than I knew what to do with and some pie-crust left to waste, so I says to our Elizabeth Ann, 'Lizzie Ann, make up a little pie for Mrs. Brindin, to let her see how well you're doing with crust. She knows good crust when she *tastes* it, and I want you to let her pass judgment on it, Lizzie Ann.' I said, likewise, 'Lizzie Ann, if thy pie-crust doesna' suit Mrs. Brindin, then thy 'usband'll never be suited.'

So here's it, Mrs. Brindin. Never mind washing the dish, please."

Mrs. Harrow, the iron monger's demure wife, herself a bride of but two months, came in one morning, dangling a long, lank hare. She had a doubtful expression on her face, and, as soon as she had crossed the threshold of our kitchen, she made haste to fling the hare on our table, exclaiming, "There, Mrs. Brindin. There it is for you to tell us on't. I bought it yestere'en down't lower road and it come this morning, early. I was going to stew it, but then I smelled it. It's not a bit nice smell, is't? I couldn't bring myself to put it in the stew. I made a pudding and dumpling dinner 'stead. Just you sniff at it, Mrs. Brindin. You know about 'em, bein' as you sold 'em, mony on 'em. It don't smell tidy, do it?" She looked anxiously at aunt. "Why, Mrs. Harrow," said my aunt, "'Ares always are that way. It all goes off in the cooking. It's nothing to bother over."

"Uh," said the iron monger's wife, "come off or not, I could never eat it. I never could. I wonder, Mrs. Brindin, if you will let Al, there, throw it away or do something with it. I will never have such a thing in my house!" and she hurried out of the kitchen.

"Al," smiled aunt, a rare smile, "here's stew and pie for near a week."

Our neighbors could not always be doing such diplomatic acts, and after a while we had to go back to treacle and bread, hourly expecting word from America. We had faith that Uncle Stanwood would let us hear from him, though his long, disheartening silence worried us considerably. Aunt did not go to work, because she hoped at any day to hear the call, "Come to America." Then in desperation Aunt had her name put on the pauper's list for a shilling a week. I had to go to the parish house on Monday mornings, and stand in line with veteran paupers—"Barley-corn Jack," the epileptic octogenarian, Widow Stanbridge, whose mother and grandparents before her had stood in this Monday line, Nat Harewell, the Crimean hero, who had a shot wound in his back, and many other minor characters who came for the shilling. The first Monday I stood in't, I chanced to step in front of "Barley-corn" Jack, who, unknown to me at the time, was usually given the place of honor at the head of the line. He clutched me by the nape of the neck, whirled me around, lifted up my upper lip with a dirty finger, and grinned, "Got a row of 'em, likely 'nough! Screw th' face, young un, screw it tight, wil't?

I was so terror stricken, and tried to escape his clutch with such desperation, that Nat Harewell interjected, "Lend 'im hup, Jack, lend 'im

hup, owld un!" and Jack did let me go with a whirl like a top until I was dazed. I fell in line near the Widow, who laughed at me, showing her black teeth; and then, while she twisted an edge of her highly flavored and discolored shawl, and chewed on it, she asked, "Was't ale ur porter 'at browt thee wi' uns, laddie?"

I replied that I was Al Priddy and that *I* was "respectable." With that, the line began to move past the clerk's window, and there was no more talking.

In such circumstances we reached the Christmas season, and still we had no word from America. It was the night before Christmas, and a night before Christmas in an English town is astir with romance, joy, and poetic feeling. The linen draper had a white clay church in his window, with colored glass windows behind which burned a candle. The butcher had his pink pig in his window with a hat on its head, a Christmas grin on its face, and a fringe of pigs' tails curled into spirals hanging in rows above him. There were tinsel laden trees with golden oranges peeping out from behind the candy stockings, wonderlands of toys, and The Home of Santy, where he was seen busy making toys for the world. I had gone down the row with my aunt, looking at all that, for aunt had said, "Al, there's to be a sorry Christ-

mas for you this time. You had better get all you can of it from the shop windows." We were pushed this way and that by the crowds that went by doing their shopping. Once we had been with them in the Christmas spirit, now we dwelt apart because of our poverty.

"My," commented aunt, with the old bitterness in her tone, "the fools! Parading afore us to let us see that *they* can have a good time of it!"

Our dark home had a more miserable aspect about it than ever when we got back. "Get right up to bed," commanded aunt, "there's no coal to waste. You can keep warm there!" and though her manner of saying it was rough, yet I heard a catch in her voice, and then she burst into tears.

"Never mind, Aunt Millie," I comforted, "uncle will write, I feel sure!" She looked up, startled, and seemed ashamed that I had found her crying and had struck her thought so.

"Who's whimpering?" she cried fiercely. "Mind your business!" But I noticed that when she came in my room that night and thought me asleep, when in reality I was keeping my ears open for the carols, she kissed me very tenderly and crept away silently.

When the carols first strike a sleeping ear, one imagines that the far-away choirs of Heaven are tuning up for the next day's chorus before

God. The first notes set such dreams a-spinning as are full of angels and ethereal thoughts. Then the ear becomes aware of time and place, and seizes upon the human note that may be found in Christmas carols when they are sung by mill people at midnight in winter weather. Then the ear begins to distinguish between this voice and that, and to follow the bass that tumbles up and down through the air. Then there is a great crescendo when the singers are right under one's window, and the words float into the chamber, each one winged with homely, human tenderness and love. So I was awakened by the carol singers that Christmas night. The first tune sung for us was, "Christians Awake," and when its three verses had awakened us, and we had gone to the window to look down on the group, "Hark! the Herald Angels Sing," was followed by a soaring adaptation of Coronation. It was a group of about fifteen. There were Old Bill Scroggs with his concertina, Harry Mills with his 'cello, and Erwind Nichols with his flute. Torvey was there, though he could not sing. He carried the lantern, caught the money that was dropped into his hat from the windows, and kept the young men and women from too much chattering as they approached the different stands. When they had finished their anthems, aunt called from the window,

"Happy Christmas good folks. It was kind of you to remember us so. It's real good." Old Torvey answered back, "Merry Christmas, Mrs. Brindin. We must get along." Then the crowd sent up a confused "Merry Christmas," and passed on.

Then it was back to bed again to sleep until awakened by an unnatural pounding on our door below. "What is it, aunt?" I cried. "I don't know," she answered. "Put on your clothes and get down before they break in the door!" I dressed hurriedly, inserted the massive iron key in the lock, gave it a turn only to have the door thrust open wide by Old Torvey, who cried excitedly, as he waved a letter in the air, "It's from Hammerica, from him!"

My aunt ran down at that, partly dressed, and screamed in her excitement. With fluttering, nervous fingers she tore open the envelope, and examined the contents in a breathless minute.

"Stanwood sent it," she laughed, "there's tickets for America and a money order for five pounds!" and then she gave in to a hysterical relapse which required the calling in of the greengrocer's wife. It *was* a Merry Christmas!

Chapter III. My Schoolmates Teach me American

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IT was an extraordinary excuse that Uncle Stanwood gave for his neglect of us. He disposed of the matter by saying, in his Christmas letter, "I was so busy and so hard put to that I had no heart to write till I had gathered enough money to send for you. I know it must have worried you."

His steamship tickets, however, had suddenly put us in the limelight in the town. "The Brindins are going over!" was the word that passed around. I can imagine no more perfect fame than the United States had gained in the minds of the men and women of our little town. America was conceived as the center of human desire, the pivot of worldly wealth, the mirror of a blissful paradise. If we had fallen heirs to peerages or had been called to Victoria's court, it is doubtful if more out-and-out respect would have been showered on us than was ours when it was known that we were going to the "States."

The impression prevailed that in America the shabbiest pauper gets a coat of gold. During

the packing, when the neighbors dropped in while Mrs. Girion made a hot brew of porter and passed it around to the visitors and the workers, an America was constructed for us rivaling the most extravagant fairy-tale ever told by Grimm.

"Yis," chattered Old Scroggs, "they's wunnerful likely things over theer in Hammerica, I'm told. I heer's 'at they spends all ther coppers for toffy and such like morsels, havin' goold a plenty — real goold! Loads o' it, they saay!"

"That's so," put in Maggie, our next-door neighbor. "Everybody has a chance, too. Double wages for very little work. All sorts of apples and good things to eat. Fine roads, too, and everybody on cycles; they're so cheap out there. They say the sun is always out, too, and not much rain!"

In somebody's memory there lingered traditions brought from America by a visitor from that country. Besides these traditions, which had to do with "gold," "paradise," and "easy work," there were a half a dozen Yankee words which we dearly loved to prate, as if by so doing we had at least a little fellowship with the wonderful country. In the school-yard my fellows drilled me on these words, Billy Hurd saying, "Now, Al, them Yankees allus talk through the nose, like this," and he illustrated by a tinpanish, nasal tone that resembled the twang of a

tight piano wire. "Now, if you're going to be American, talk like that, it's real Yankee. Now let's see you try the word, "Candy," which is what they call toffy over there. Only don't forget to talk through the nose like I did."

So I dug my hands deep in my pockets, "cocked my jib," as we called looking pert, and drawled out in most exaggerated form, "Saay, Ha'nt, want tew buy teow cents wuth of kaandy?"

"That's just like Yankee," complimented Billy. So I went home, called my aunt's attention to what I was going to do, and repeated the sentence, much to her delight.

"That's right, Al," she said, "learn all the American you can, it will help out when we get there!"

Filled with incidents like these, the days of our English lingering rapidly drew to an end, and every thought in my mind had an ocean steamship at the end of it. The neighbors made it a "time of tender gloom," for it could be nothing else to a mature person, this taking up of the Brindin family history by the root for transplantation, this breaking off of intimate relationships which, through blood, reached back into misty centuries. Then, too, there was the element of adventure, of risk, for we little knew what prospects were in store for us in that strange land: what would be the measure

of our reward for going there. The neighbors were very solemn, but the strange thing about it lay in the fact that there was not one, insular as the British are heralded, who thought that the proposed trip should not be taken!

Finally we came to the farewells and I made mine very concrete. As it was clearly understood that everybody who went to America attained great wealth, I told Clara Chidwick that I would send her a fine gold watch, and when her sister Eline cried with envy, I vowed to send her a diamond brooch. Harry Lomick went off with the promise of five new American dollars, Jimmy Hedding was consoled with the promise of two cases of American "candy," while Chaddy Ashworth vowed eternal friendship when I promised him a barrel of American apples, and, on the strength of that, as my dearest friend, we mutually promised to marry sisters, to keep house next door to one another when we grew up, and to share whatever good fortune might come to us in the shape of money!

Quite a body-guard of friends saw us off at the station. "Good luck to you!" was the prevailing cry, as we sat in our compartment waiting for the train to start for Liverpool. Then the guard shouted, "All aboard!" and we were in the first, exciting stage of our great adventure.

I settled myself back against the leather back

WHEN THE TRAIN STARTED FOR LIVERPOOL, I COUNTED MY PENNIES WHILE MY AUNT WEPT BITTERLY

of the seat wondering why my aunt was crying so, and then I began to count the pennies with which I planned to purchase some oranges in Liverpool.

Our night in Liverpool, our last night on English soil, is summed up in a memory of a cheap hotel, a stuffy room, and a breakfast on an uncountable number of hard-boiled eggs. In the morning, early, we left that place and were taken on a tram-car to the dock. There I did purchase some oranges from an old witch of an orange woman, big football oranges, which when peeled were small enough, for they had been boiled to thicken the peel, so Aunt said.

On the steerage deck we were jostled by Jews with their bedding and food supplies. At ten o'clock, after we had stood in the vaccination line, the ship sailed from the dock, and I leaned over the side watching the fluttering handkerchiefs fade, as a snow flurry fades. Then the tugs left us alone on the great, bottle-green deep. There was a band in my heart playing, "I'm going to the land of the free and the home of the brave!"

When one makes a blend of bilge-water, new paint, the odor of raw onions, by confining them in an unventilated space under deck, and adds to that blend the cries of ill-cared-for babies, the swearing of vulgar women, and the complain-

ing whine of sickly children, one knows what the steerage on the old "Alaska" was to me. The Jews owned the warm, windswept deck, where they sat all day on the tins which covered the steam-pipes, and munched their raw fish, black bread, and flavored the salt air with the doubtful odor of juicy onions. I heard the English forswear the bearded tribe, denounce them for unbelievers, sniff at the mention of the food they ate; but after all, the English had the wrong end of the stick; they had to stay below deck most of the time, and sicken themselves with the poor, unwholesome fare provided by the ship.

My aunt said to me, one day, "Al, I'd give the world for one of them raw onions that the Jews eat. They're Spanish onions, too, that makes it all the more aggravating."

"Why don't you ask them for a piece of one?" I inquired innocently.

"What," she sniffed, "ask a Jew? Never!" But when I begged one from a Jew boy, she ate it eagerly enough.

The height of romance for me, however, was in the person of Joe, a real stowaway. He was found on the second day out, and was given the task of peeling the steerage potatoes, a task that kept him busy enough throughout the day. My mouth went open to its full extent, when, after helping him with his potatoes, he would reward

me by paring off thick slices of callouse from his palms. Joe said to me, "Never mind, lad, if I work hard they'll sure land me in Boston when we arrive. I'm going to wark hard so they'll like me. I do want to go to the States!"

In the women's cabins, where I had my berth, they held evening concerts of a very decided pathetic kind. Like minor tunes, they always ended in a mournful wailing; for many of the women knew tragedies at first hand, and were in the midst of tragedy, so that their songs and humors were bound to be colored by despair. Carrie Bess, a stout woman whose white neck was crumpled in folds like a washboard, had wit enough to change the somberness of a morgue. She was usually the presiding officer in charge of the concerts. She was on her way to rejoin her husband, though she did not know where he was, but she said, "I'll get on the train and have it stop in Texas where Jek (Jack) is." And with this indefinite optimism she threw care to the winds and frolicked. She would throw herself astride a chair, wink at us all, open her mouth like a colored minstrel, and sing lustily,

"It's very hard to see a girl
Sitting on a young man's knee.
If I only had the man I love,
What a 'apy girl I'd be!"

Then, when the program had been gone through, with the oft-repeated favorites, like Carrie Bess' "It's Very Hard," the concert would always close with an old sea song that somebody had introduced, a song which, as I lay in my berth and sleepily heard it sung under those miserable swinging lamps, amid the vitiated atmosphere of the cabin, and with the sea sounds, wind, splash of waves, and hissing steam, summed up all the miserable spirit of isolation on a great ocean:

"Jack was the best in the band,
Wrecked while in sight of the land,
If he ever comes back, my sailor boy, Jack,
I'll give him a welcome home!"

When the numbered sails of pilots hove in sight, and the lightships, guarding hidden shoals with their beacon masts, were passed, the steerage began to get ready for its entrance in the land of dreams. The song went up, every throat joining in:

"Oh, we're going to the land where they pave the streets with money, la, di, da, la, di, da!"

Finally we sighted a golden band in the distance, a true promise of what we expected America to be. It was Nantasket Beach. That made us put on our Sunday clothes, tie up our goods, and assemble at the rail to catch a further

glimpse of the great paradise. An American woman gave me a cent, the first bit of American money my fingers ever touched.

Then the black sheds, the harbor craft, and the white handkerchiefs came into view. I strained an eager, flushing face in an effort to place Uncle Stanwood, but I could not find him.

Nearly all the passengers had left in company with friends, but my aunt and I had to stay on board in instant fear of having to return to England, for uncle was not there to meet us. I saw poor Joe, the stowaway, in chains, waiting to be examined by the authorities for his "crime." I felt fully as miserable as he, when I whispered to him, "poor Joe!"

After many hours uncle did arrive, and we had permission to land in America. I confess that I looked eagerly for the gold-paved streets, but the Assay Office could not have extracted the merest pin-head from the muddy back street we rode through in a jolting team of some sort. I saw a black-faced man, and cried for fear. I had a view of a Chinaman, with a pigtail, and I drew back from him until uncle said, "You'll see lots of them here, Al, so get used to it." When I sat in the station, waiting for the train, I spent my first American money in America. I purchased a delectable, somewhat black, banana!

Chapter IV. I pick up a handful of America, make an American cap, whip a Yankee, and march home whistling "Yankee Doodle"

Chapter IV. I pick up a handful of America, make an American cap, whip a Yankee, and march home whistling, "Yankee Doodle"

THE full revealing of the America of my dreams did not come until the following morning. Docks, back streets, stations, and the smoky, dusty interiors of cars, were all I had seen the previous night. When we had arrived in New Bedford, I heard the noise of a great city, but I had been so stupid with excitement and weariness that no heed had been paid to passing scenes. I had gone to bed in a semi-conscious state in the boarding-house where Uncle Stanwood made his home. But in the morning, after I realized that I was in America, that it was an American bed on which I slept, that the wall-paper was American, and that the

window-blind, much crumpled and cracked, over the window, was the great drop-curtain which, drawn to its full height, would show me a stage, set with a glitter of things wondrous to the sight, I exclaimed aloud, "Chaddy, oh, Chaddy, I'm in America!"

Just as one hesitates with esthetic dreaming over a jewel hidden in a leaden casket, getting as much joy from anticipation as possible, so I speculated in that dingy room before I pulled up the curtain. What should I see? Trees with trunks of chrysolites, with all the jewels of Aladdin's cave dripping from their boughs, streets paved with gold, people dressed like lords? All, all outside, with only that crumpled blind between me and them? Thus, with an inflamed anticipation and a magnified dream fancy, I hurried across the room, and let the window blind snap out of my nervous clutch clear to the top. I pressed my eyes close to the glass, and there — Oh, the breaking-down of dreams, the disillusionment of the deluded! There was a glaring sun staring down on a duck-yard: a magnified duck-yard, bare of grass, of shrubs, criss-crossed with clothes-lines, littered with ashes, refuse, and papers, with flapping mill clothes, and great duck-house; drab tenements, all alike, and back of them the bleak brick walls of a cotton mill!

But never mind, I was in America! Chaddy was not. The scene I had looked upon was disheartening, somewhat like a sudden blow in the face, for those box-like, wooden duck-houses were not to be compared with the ivy-covered, romantic rows of Hadfield with their flower-gardens, arches, and slate roofs! But I was in America, anyway!

We had the breakfast-table to ourselves, uncle, aunt, and myself, for the boarders had gone to work long ago, and this was our holiday, our first American day! What are those round golden things with holes in? Doughnuts? They don't grow on trees, do they? Baked? Isn't it funny they call them "nuts?" I don't taste any nut flavor to them. But I could not linger too long at the table with all America waiting to be explored.

"Don't gulp down things like that," warned aunt, "you'll be sick, proper sick. Chew your food!"

"I want to go out and see America, aunt!"

"All right," she assented. "Go on out, but mind the American lads, now!"

So I left the house, and the first act done when I reached the gate had in it, crystallized, the deep reverence an alien feels for America. I bent down and picked up a handful of dirt. I wanted to feel America.

Then I walked down the street of tenements, looking for an outlet from them, and hoping to get away from the shadow of the mill. At last the tenements were passed, and I saw some vacant building lots, with huge, gaudy sign boards staring from them. It was here that I heard a voice from across the road, shouting in broad derision, "Strike him!" A group of school boys were pointing at me. In the hasty survey I gave them, I noted that they all wore round caps. Mine had a shining visor on it. I hurried along behind one of those huge signs, took out my pocket knife, and slashed off the visor. Immediately I felt Americanized. I went forth with some show of a swagger, for I thought that now, wearing a round cap, everybody would take me for a full-fledged American!

But it was not so. Under a railway viaduct, where the shadows were thick and cool, I was met by a lad of my own age, but with twenty times more swagger and pertness showing on him. When he saw me, he frowned at first, then, grinning insultingly, he came to within two inches of me, planted himself belligerently, and mocked, " 'Ello, Green'orn! Just come acrost, 'ast?" Whereat, knowing full well that he was heaping slander on my mother speech, I threw caution to the winds, hurled myself at him, and was soon engaged in tense battle. The

fight did not last long, for, keeping up the English schoolboy tradition, I not only pounded with clenched fists, but freely used my feet — a combination that put to nought whatever pugilistic skill my antagonist possessed.

"No fair, usin' feet," he complained, as he nursed a bruised shin and hobbled off, "Green-'orn!"

That word, "Greenhorn," startled me. I cautiously felt of my head, for it flashed into my mind that it was very possible, in this magic land, that English people grew green horns immediately upon arrival; but I was consoled to find that none had sprouted overnight.

I continued my exploration, and found myself surrounded on every hand by mills, tenements, and shops. The streets were very dirty: the whole scene was as squalid as could be. Yet, the thought kept comforting me, I was in America. I returned home, covered with burdock burrs, arranged in the form of epaulets, stripes, and soldier buttons, whistling with gusto a shrill rendition of "Yankee Doodle." So ended my first morning as an American.

Chapter V. I cannot become a President, but I can go to the Dumping Grounds

Chapter V. I cannot become a President, but I can go to the Dumping Grounds

UNCLE and aunt went out that afternoon. "We're going looking for a tenement," said uncle. "We'll be back by supper time, Al. Mind now, and not get into mischief." They were gone until past the regular supper hour, and I waited for them in my room. When they did arrive, uncle seemed very much excited, and in greeting me he put five cents in my hand, and then extracted from his pocket a handful of crisp, baked pieces which he said were "salted crackers." The only crackers with which I was acquainted were Chinese crackers, which we exploded on Guy Fawkes day in England.

"Will they shoot off?" I asked him.

"No, they're to eat," he answered. "There's salt on them to make you eat more, too."

"Where do you get them?" was my next question.

"At saloons," he replied. "When you get a drink of beer, they have these near to make you drink more." I looked up startled, and sniffed the breath of my aunt, who stood near, nodding her head rapidly, as if answering the questions of a Gatling gun.

"Why," I gasped, "you've both been drinking! Both of you!" Aunt Millie made a stroke at my head, then lurched in doing it, and almost sprawled to the floor.

"What if we have, Impudence?" she snapped. "When did you sit in judgment o'er us, eh?"

Then my uncle, in an apologetic tone, broke in, "There, Al, lad, we only stopped in one place; sort of celebration, lad, after being separated so long. Don't say anything about it, lad. I'll give you five cents more." But Aunt Millie flew into a terrible rage. "Don't apologize, Stanwood. Give him a clout i' the head, and let him be careful what he says. Drinkin', eh? I show him," and she suddenly swung her fist against my ear, and sent me stumbling to the floor. At that, Uncle Stanwood rushed at her, although he was lurching, and grasping her wrist, called, "There, Millie, that's enough." That brought on an altercation, in the midst of which the landlady came up, and said, "Stop that noise, or I'll call the police. I'll give you another day for to get out of this. I keep a respectable

house, mind you, and I won't, I simply won't have drinking taking place here. The boarders won't stand for it!"

"Oh, you insultin' vixin, you!" screamed aunt, brandishing her arms in the air with savage fury, "Don't you go to sittin' on the seat of virtue like that! Didn't I see the beer man call in your kitchen this morning? You hypocrite, you!"

"Oh," screamed the landlady, leaving the room, "let me hear one more sound and in comes the police. I won't stand it!"

"There," cried Aunt Millie, consoled by the landlady's departure, "I knew that would bring her. Now, Stanwood, let's finish that little bottle before bedtime. This is our first day in America." Uncle Stanwood pulled from his pocket a flask of whisky, and I left them sitting on the edge of the bed drinking from it.

The next morning Uncle Stanwood went to the mill where he was working, and told the overseer that he must have another day off in which to get a tenement and get settled. Then he and aunt found a tidy house just outside the blocks of duck houses, and, after renting it, went to the shopping center, where they chose a complete housekeeping outfit and made the terms of payment,—"One Dollar Down and a Dollar a Week." That plunged us into debt right off, and I later

learned that even our steamship tickets had been purchased from an agency on somewhat the same terms. The landlady had told Aunt Millie that my uncle had been a steady drinker since his stay with her, shortly after his arrival in the United States.

"That accounts for his having so little money, then," commented my aunt. "I fail to see where he's making a much better man of himself than he was across the water."

At last Aunt Millie had the satisfaction of "setting up American housekeeping," as she termed it. But she did not find much romance in this new kind of housekeeping.

"See that homely thing," she complained, indicating the stove, "Give me that old fireplace and the stone kitchen floor! I've a good mind to pack my tin box and take the next boat," she half cried, throughout those first days of Americanization. "I don't, for the life of me, see whatever brought me over here to this forsaken place!"

I had to share in the blunders that were made. I was heartily laughed at by the produce pedler when I asked him for "two pounds of potatoes." The yeast-cake man looked at me blankly when I asked for "a penny's worth of barm." Aunt Millie did not see how she was ever going to make a family baking from a piece of yeast an

inch square, when she had been wont to put in the same amount of flour a handful of brewer's barm. On Sunday morning the baker's cart came with hot pots of beans crested with burnt lumps of pork. We had to learn to eat beans and brown bread.

"I'm sure," said my aunt when I brought home a five-cent loaf, "that they rise the dough with potatoes; its so light and like dried chips!" For the first time in my life I was surfeited with pastry. I bought several square inches of frosted cake from the baker for five cents, and ate it in place of the substantial food I had lived on in England. In place of making meals, when she wanted to visit with the neighbors, my aunt would give me five cents to spend on anything I liked.

The springtime was full on, and I found much pleasure in mixing with the tenement boys and girls, after school hours. While the schools were in session, however, I had a lonely time of it. But it was on those steps that I began to form a conception of what it means to be an American. It meant to me, then, the ability to speak slang, to be impertinent to adults, calling one's father, "Old Man," one's mother, "My Old Woman," and one's friend, "that guy." The whole conception rounded out, however, in the hope of some day becoming the President of The United

States, and I was considerably chagrined, and my coming to America seemed a fruitless task, when I learned, from Minnie Helphin, a German girl, that "You got for to be borned into the United States, for to be like us 'Mericans, to be Preser-dent. My brudder, Hermann, him for to be Preser-dent, sometimes."

I grew tired of being alone while the others went to school, so that one day, in spite of the warning that the "truant officer" might get hold of me, I went to one of the school yards, and, through the iron fence, watched all my friends at play, and immediately I said to myself, "You ought to go, too!" That night I said to my aunt, at the supper table, "I want to go to an American school." She looked at me with a frown.

"School, is it? Who said so, the government?"

"No," I answered, trembling in fear of her, "it wasn't the government. I get lonely while they are at school. That's why I want to go."

She laughed, "Oh, we'll soon find something for you to do more profitable than going to school. Go to school! What are you bothering me about school for? Education's only for them that are learning to be gentlemen. You're a poor lad, and must be thinking more about getting to work. Here we are, head and ears in debt! Up to our neck in it, right away! We

owe for the furniture. That chair you're sitting on isn't ours. That stove isn't paid for. Nothing's ours, hardly the clothes on our backs. How we are to pay for it all, gets me. You've got to knuckle down with a will, young man, and help us out of the hole we're in!"

"But the lad's got to have schooling, Millie!" protested my uncle. She turned upon him with flashing eyes, and, half-crying with sudden anger, shouted at the top of her voice, "Listen to that! I'd like to know what *you* have to strike in this for. It's you and your drinking's brought us to this pitch. There you can sit, while we are head and ears in debt, nothing to call our own, and propose that this Impudent go to school. He's got to go out on the street with the McNulty lads and get wood and coal. That will be something towards helping out. Never mind about school till the government makes him go. That will be plenty of time for SCHOOL!"

"Picking wood and coal?" I asked, with interest in this new scheme to keep me busy.

"Yes," she explained. "I was in McNulty's this afternoon, and Mrs. McNulty was telling me that she's entirely kept in coal and wood by her two lads, Pat and Tim. Seems to me that you might make yourself useful like that, too, instead of bothering your little brain about getting learning."

"I don't like to have him out on the street," protested Uncle, somewhat feebly.

"It's not a case of like or dislike, this time," said Aunt Millie, "it's a case of got to. You don't bring in enough to pay up everything, so you *shut up!* You and your fifteen dollars won't make creation, not a bit! Get off out of this. Go to the toy store, and get a cart or something for Al to get wood in, instead of sitting there telling me what is right and what is wrong. Go on; I'm going to send him out in the morning."

Uncle took me with him to the toy-store, where I helped select an express wagon, with tin rims, front wheels that turned this way and that, and the name, "Champion," in red letters on its sides. Uncle rode me home in it, and seemed to enjoy the drag it gave him up hill. "There," he whispered when we reached our door, "don't tell your aunt that I rode you. She might not like it, Al, lad!"

The next morning Pat and Tim called at the house for me. They had been generously kept at home that day to show me their "pickings." I felt a trifle puffed up over the gaudy appearance of my new wagon, for my companions' was a crude, deep box with odd baby-carriage wheels, and it was named, by a black smudged tar sign, "The Shamrock." But I did not long exult,

for Tim, a little undersized fellow of fourteen, said, manfully, "Now, Priddy, if we shows yer things, yer got to divvy up, see!"

"What?" I asked.

"Got to square up," he said, and with no more ado he placed himself in my new wagon. When we were out of sight of the house, Pat gave him the handle of "The Shamrock," and placed himself in the depths of that dilapidated wagon, and I was told to "Drawr us. Yer th' hoss. See?"

So Pat and Tim took me to the "pickings." In our excursions we visited buildings that were in the process of reshingling, when we piled our wagons to abnormal heights with the dry, mossy old ones. We went on the trail of fires, where we poked among the fallen timbers for half-burnt sticks. There were skirmishes in the vicinity of coal-yards, at the rear of the sheds, where, through breaks and large, yawning cracks, pieces of coal sometimes dropped through. We scouted on the trail of coal wagons through cobbled, jolt streets, and managed to pick up what they lost. We adventured on dangerous spurs of railroad track, on marshy cinder dumps outside mill fences, and to the city dumping-grounds for loads of cinders, coal, and wood.

After a washing rainstorm, in the night, my aunt would say, "Now, Al, there's been a good

rain, and it must have washed the dust off the clinkers and cinders so that you might get a good bagful of cinders. You'd best go before someone else gets ahead of you." True enough, I would find them in the ash heaps, as black as seeds in a watermelon, the half-burnt coals, which I loaded in my bushel bag and carried home in my wagon at five cents a load. If I returned with my bag empty, there was always some drastic form of punishment given me.

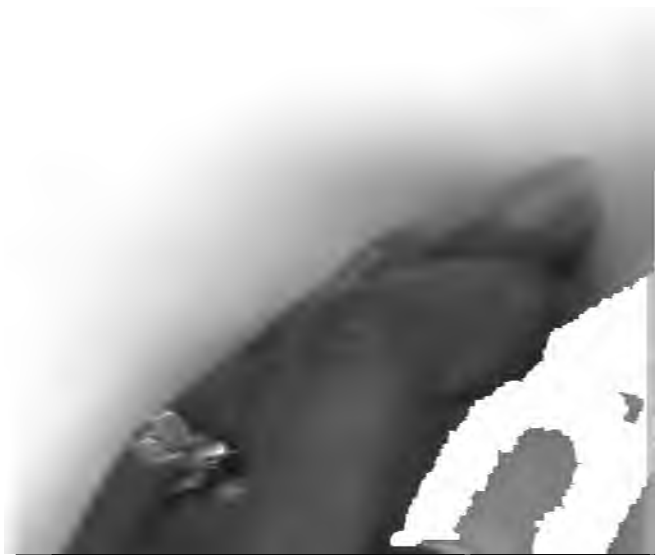
Life on the city dumping-grounds was generally a return to the survival of the fittest. There was exemplified poverty in its ugliest aspect. The Charles street dumps were miniature Alps of dusty rubbish rising out of the slimy ooze of a pestiferous and stagnant swamp, in which slinking, monstrous rats burrowed, where clammy bullfrogs gulped, over which poisonous flies hummed on summer days, and from which arose an overpowering, gassy nauseation. On a windy day, the air was filled by a whirling, odorous dust of ashes. It stirred every heap of rubbish into a pungent mass of rot. When the Irishmen brought the two-horse dump-carts, and swung their load on the heap, every dump-picker was sure to be smothered in a cloud of choking dust, as sticks, hoes, rakes, and fingers, in mad competition, sought whatever prize of rag, bottle, wood, or cinder came in sight. This was the

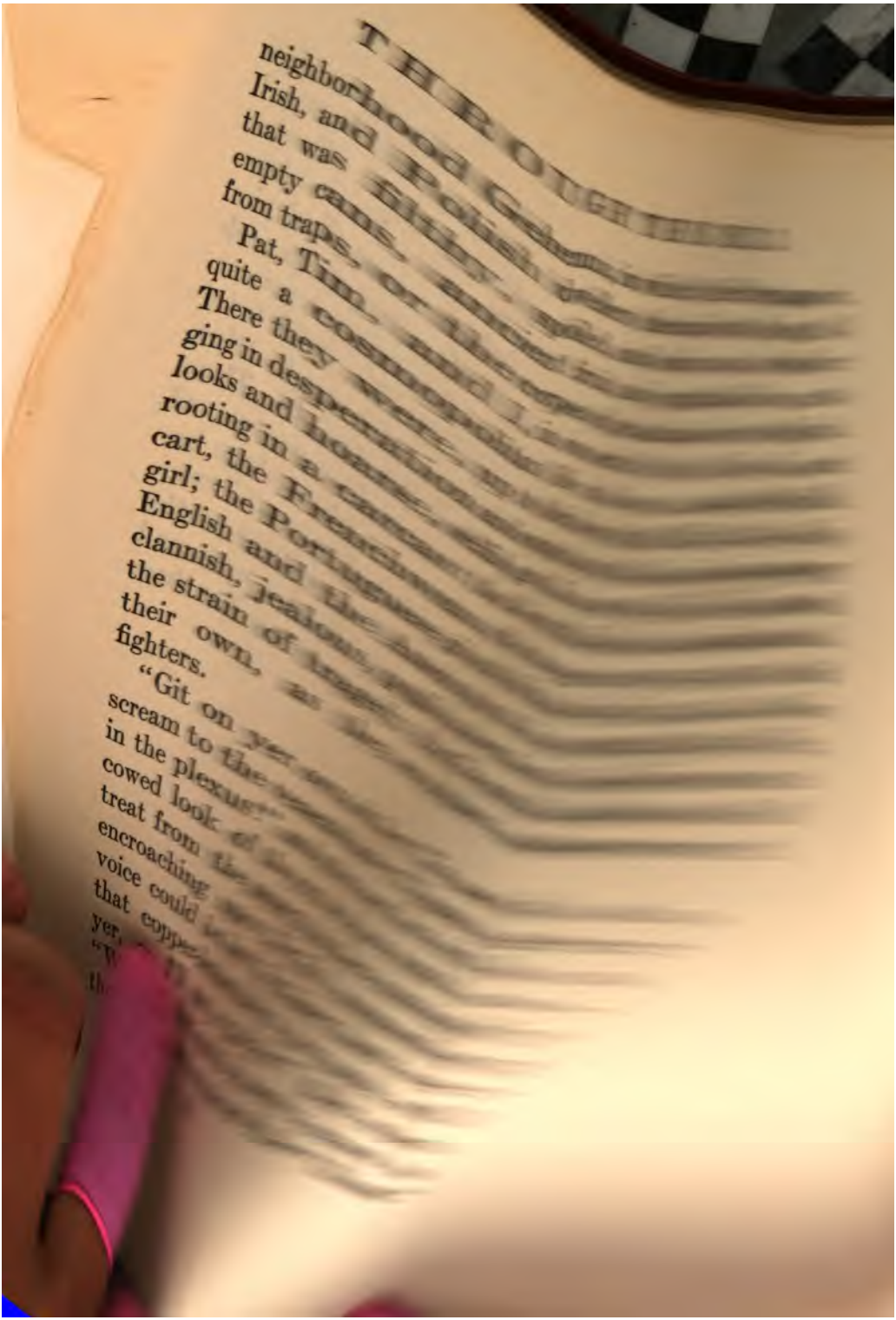
PAT AND TIM LED ME TO THE CHARLES STREET DUMPING GROUND—
WHICH WAS THE NEIGHBORHOOD GEHENNA

neighborhood Gehenna, in which the Portuguese, Irish, and Polish dwellers thereabouts flung all that was filthy, spoiled, and odorous, whether empty cans, ancient fruit and vegetables, rats from traps, or the corpses of pet animals or birds.

Pat, Tim, and I, in our search for fuel, met quite a cosmopolitan life on those ash-hills. There they were, up to their knees in filth, digging in desperation and competition, with hungry looks and hoarse, selfish growls, like a wolf pack rooting in a carcass: the old Jew, with his hand-cart, the Frenchwoman, with her two-year old girl; the Portuguese girls and the Irish lads, the English and the American pickers, all in strife, clannish, jealous, pugilistic, and never free from the strain of tragedy. Pat and Tim could hold their own, as they were well-trained street fighters.

"Git on yer own side, Sheeny," Tim used to scream to the venerable Israelite; "I'll punch yer in the plexus!" and without a word, but with a cowed look of the eyes, the old man would retreat from the property he had been cunningly encroaching upon. Then Tim's commanding voice could be heard, "Say, Geeser, hand over that copper-bottomed boiler to yer uncle, will yer, or I'll smash yer phiz in!" But when "Wallop" Smitz brought his rowdy crowd to the dump, it was like an invasion of the "Huns."





We were driven from the dump in dismay, often with our clothes torn and our wagons battered.

And oh, what prizes of the dump! Cracked plates, cups and saucers, tinware, bric-à-brac, footwear, clothing, nursing-bottles and nipples, bottles with the dregs of flavoring extracts, cod-liver oil, perfumes, emulsions, tonics, poisons, antiseptics, cordials, decayed fruit, and faded flowers! These were seized in triumph, taken home in glee, and no doubt used in faith. There is little philosophy in poverty, and questions of sanitation and prudence come in the stage beyond it. "Only bring me coal and wood," commanded my aunt, in regard to my visits to the dumps, but I managed to save rubbers, rags, and metal, as a side product, and get money for them from the old Jew junk-man.

Chapter VI. The Luxurious Possibilities of the Dollar-Down-Dollar-a-Week System of House-keeping

Chapter VI. The Luxurious Possibilities of the Dollar-Down-Dollar-a-Week System of Housekeeping

DURING the remainder of the school year, from March to June, no public-school officer came to demand my attendance at school.

"Aren't we lucky?" commented Aunt Millie. It gives you such a chance to help out. The instalment men must be paid, and we need every cent. It's *such* a mercy that the long holiday's on. It gives you a good chance."

By this time I had added to my activities that of carrying my uncle's dinner to the mill. My aunt always considered this a waste of time. "It takes Al away from his own work," she would remonstrate with my uncle. "If he has to carry your dinner, I wish he would take it in his wagon so that he can bring back what coal and wood he finds on the street." When that

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combination was in effect, she was mollified, for I managed to secure a load of fuel almost every day in my journey from the mill to the house.

This was the first cotton-mill I ever entered. Every part of it, inside, seemed to be as orderly as were the rows of bricks in its walls. It was a new mill. Its walls were red and white, as were the iron posts that reached down in triple rows through the length of it. There was the odor of paint everywhere. The machinery seemed set for display, it shone and worked so smoothly. The floor of the mule room, where uncle worked, was white and smooth. The long alleys at the ends of the mules were like the decks of a ship. The whirling, lapping belts had the pungent odor of new leather about them, and reminded me of the smell of a new pair of shoes. The pulleys and shaftings gleamed under their high polish. Altogether it was a wonderful sight to my eyes, which, for some time, had only seen dismal tenements, dirty streets, and drifting ash heaps.

The mill was trebly attractive on chilly, rainy days, when it was so miserable a task outside to finger among soggy ash piles for coals and to go splashing barefooted through muddy streets. At such times it was always a relief to feel the warm, greasy boards of the mill underneath my feet, and to have my body warmed by the great heat. No matter how it rained outside with

the rain-drops splashing lonesomely against the windows, it did not change the atmosphere of the mill one jot. The men shouted and swore as much as ever, the doffers rode like whirlwinds on their trucks, the mules creaked on the change, the belts hummed and flapped as regularly as ever.

It was very natural, then, that I should grow to like the mill and hate the coal picking. My uncle gave me little chores to do while he ate his dinner. He taught me how to start and stop a mule; how to clean and take out rollers; how to piece broken threads, and lift up small cops. When the doffers came to take the cops off the spindles, I learned to put new tubes on and to press them in place at the bottom of the spindles. I found it easy to use an oil can, to clean the cotton from the polished doors of the mules, to take out empty bobbins of cotton rope, and put in full ones to give a new supply for the thread which was spun.

I became so valuable a helper during the noon hour that my uncle persuaded my aunt to put in some dinner for me, also, so that I could eat it with him. He did this simply because he wanted me to have some reward for my work besides the fifteen cents a week he gave me. So I used to sit with him, and he would divide a meat pie with me, let me drink some coffee from

the top of the dinner pail, and share a piece of pudding. There was always a bright gleam in his eyes as he watched me eat, a gleam that said as plainly as words, "It's good to see you have a good time, Al, lad!"

By the end of the summer I was so familiar with the mill that I wanted to spend my whole time in it. I had watched the mill boys, some of them not much older than myself — and I was only eleven — and I wanted to swagger up and down the alleys like them. They were lightly clad in undershirt and overalls, so that in their bared feet they could run without slipping on the hot floor. *They* were working for wages, too, and took home a pay envelope every Saturday. Just think of going home every Saturday, and throwing an envelope on the table with three dollars in it, and saying, nonchalantly, "Aunt, there's my wages. Just fork over my thirty cents spending money. I'm going to see the matinee this afternoon at the theater. It's 'Michael Strogroff,' and they say there's a real fight in the second act and eight changes of scenery, for ten cents. They've got specialties between the acts, too!"

Other temporal considerations entered into this desire to go into the mill. I wanted to have a dinner-pail of my own, with a whole meat-pie in it, or a half-pound of round steak with its

gravy dripping over a middle of mashed potatoes with milk and butter in them! Then there were apple dumplings to consider, and freedom from coal picking and the dirty life on the dumps. All in all, I knew it would be an excellent exchange, if possible. I spoke to my uncle about it one noon hour.

"Why can't I work in the mill, too?" I asked.

"Wouldn't you rather get some learning, Al?" he asked. "You know men can't do much in the world without learning. It's brains, not hands, that makes the world really go ahead. I wish you could get a lot of schooling and perhaps go to college. It's what I always wanted and never got, and see where I am to-day. I'm a failure, Al, that's what I am!"

"But aunt says that I've got to go in the mill as soon as I can, uncle."

His face grew sad at that, and he said, "Yes, through our drinking and getting in debt! That's what it's all leading to! It's a pity, a sad pity!" and he grew so gloomy that I spoke no more about the matter that day.

It was one of the paradoxes of my home, that being heavily in debt for our steamship tickets and household furnishings, and both giving a large amount of patronage to the saloons, my aunt and uncle involved themselves more inextricably in debt by buying clothes and ornaments

on the "Dollar-Down-Dollar-a-Week" plan. There was no economy, no recession of tastes, no limit of desire to save us. Every penny that I secured was spent as soon as earned. I learned this from my foster parents. Uncle had his chalk-mark at the saloon, and aunt received regular thrice-a-week visits from the beer pedler. On gala days, when there was a cheap excursion down the bay, aunt could make a splendid appearance on the street in a princess dress, gold bracelets, a pair of earrings, and gloves (Dollar-Down-Dollar-a-Week plan). When Mrs. Terence O'Boyle, and Mrs. Hannigan, daughter to Mrs. O'Boyle, and Mrs. Redden, the loom fixer's wife with her little baby, came to our house, after the breakfast had been cleared away, and the men were hard at work, Aunt Millie would exclaim, "Now, friends, the beer man's just brought a dozen lagers and a bottle of port wine. Sit right up, and make a merry morning of it. You must be tired, Mrs. Hannigan. Won't your babby take a little sup of port for warming his stomach?" Of course, Mrs. O'Boyle returned these parties, as did her daughter and Mrs. Redden.

My uncle dared not say too much about the visits of the beer wagon, because he had his own score at the saloon, and his appetite for drink was transcendant. Aunt had little ways of her

own for pacifying him in the matter. She would save a half dozen bottles till night, and then, when he came home, she would say, "Now, Stanwood, after tea, let's be comfortable. I've six bottles in for you, and we'll take our comfort grand!"

By Friday morning the financial fret began. My aunt, as financier of the house, had the disposal of her husband's fifteen dollars in charge. In the disposal of this amount, she indulged in a weird, incomprehensible arithmetical calculation, certainly original if not unique. In place of numerals and dollar signs, she dotted a paper with pencil points, and did some mysterious but logical ruminating in her head. Her reasoning always followed this line, however:

"Fifteen dollars with a day out, that leaves — let me see — oh, say in round numbers, thirteen, maybe a few cents out. Well, now, let me see, out of that comes, first of all, forty cents for union money, if he pays it this week; two and a half for rent, only we owe fifty cents from last week, which we must pay this, or else we'll be thrown out. Then there's fifteen cents for that dude of an insurance man — he says he'll lapse us if we let it run on like we have. Let him do it, the old cheat! I don't believe they'd plan to pay us if any of us should die. They're nothing but robbers, anyhow. Where was I, Al? Let me see, there's owing a dollar for the furniture —

WHEN will we have it paid for? — and there's two dollars that should be paid the Jew, only we'll have to satisfy him with fifty cents this week, because there's a day out." (The Jew was the man who kept the "New England Clothing and Furnishing Company," from whom we had bought our clothes, a set of furs, and the gold bracelets on instalments.) "This week's bill for groceries is five dollars and sixty-three cents, the baker has owing him about seventy-five, the meat man let me have them two ham bones and that shank end, and I owe him for that; there's some white shirts and collars at the Chinaman's, but I want to say right here that your uncle will have to pay for those out of his own spending-money. That's too much of a luxury, that is; we can't go on with such gentlemanly notions in this house and ever get ahead. Oh, these debts, when will they be paid! That is all I think of except the beer man. He won't wait, whatever comes or goes. There, that reckons up to — why, how in the name of God are we going to face the world this way? I'm getting clean worn out with this figuring every week!"

After finding that she would not have money enough to go around to satisfy all the clamorants, she would proceed with a process of elimination, putting off first the tradesman who received

explanations with the most graciousness. The insurance man she did not care for, so he had to be put off, but, with his own interests in mind, he would carry us out of his own pocket until some grand week when aunt would feel kindly towards him, and she would generously make up all back payments. Aunt always went to the uttermost limit of credit possibility, arranging her numerous creditors like checkers on a board to be moved backwards and forwards week by week. The *beer man got his pay every week.* He did not allow *his* bills to grow old. In arranging for that payment, aunt used to say, as if protesting to her own conscience, "Well, suppose some others *do* have to wait! I want to have a case of lager in over Sunday. We're not going to scrimp and slave without *some enjoyment!*"

Week after week this same exasperating allotment of uncle's wage took place, with but minor variations. Time after time the insurance would drop behind and would be taken up again. Time after time the Jew would threaten to put the lawyers on us. Time after time the grocer would withhold credit until we paid our bill. yet the beer-wagon stopped regularly at our door, and Mrs. O'Boyle, her daughter, and Mrs. Redden would exchange courtesies and bottles. And Aunt was always consoling her sister women on such occasions with this philosophy: "The

rich have carriages and fine horses and grand mansions for enjoyment; we poor folks, not having such, must get what comfort we can out of a stimulating sup!"

And Mrs. Redden would reply, "Yes, Mrs. Brindin, you're right for sure. Just warm a bit of that ale with a bit of sugar stirred in, will you, please? It will warm the baby's belly. I forgot to bring his milk bottle, like the absent-minded I am."

Chapter VII. I am given the Privilege of Choosing my own Birthday

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THE reopening of the public schools in the fall found Aunt Millie stubbornly refusing to allow me to enter. "I shall never know anything," I protested. But she replied, with confidence, "All knowledge and wisdom isn't in schools. There's as much common sense needed in getting a living. I'll keep you out just as long as the truant officer keeps away. Mind, now, and not run blind into him when you're on the street. If you do — why, you'll know a thing or two, young man!"

Uncle pleaded with her in my behalf, but she answered him virulently, "Stop that, you boozer, you! We must get out of debt and never mind making a gentleman, which you seem set on. I'd be ashamed if I was you. Let him only earn a few dollars, and we'd be relieved. Goodness

knows when you're going to drop out, the way you're guzzling things down. It wouldn't surprise me to see you on your back any day, and I want to be ready."

But some days later, my uncle came back home from work with much to say. "Look here, Millie, it might be good for us to send Al to school right away. If he must go in the mill, as it seems he must as soon as he can, then it's to our advantage to get him in right away!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that he can't go into the mill, according to law, until thirty weeks after he's thirteen, and can show his school certificate."

"But he's only just turned eleven," protested my aunt, "that would keep him in the school practically three years. *Three years!*"

"Normally, it would," agreed Uncle Stanwood, "but it don't *need* to take that long, if we don't care to have it so."

"I'd like to know why!"

"Well, Millie," explained uncle, "Al's not been to school in America, yet. All we have to do is to put his age forward when he does go in — make him a year or two older than he actually is. They won't ask for birth certificates or school papers from England. They will take our word for it. Then it won't be long before we can have him working. Harry Henshaw tells me the

trick's common enough. Then when Al's worked a while, and we get out of debt, he can go on with his schooling. It's the only way to keep ahead, though I do hate to have him leave school, God knows!"

"None of that cant," snapped aunt; "if it wasn't for your drinking he wouldn't have to go in the mill, and you know it."

"Yes," agreed uncle, sadly, "I know it!"

"Then," said aunt, once more referring to the immediate subject of the conference, "it's all decided that we get him in as soon as possible."

"Yes," agreed uncle, "we can put him any age we want, and lie about it like many are doing. What age shall we make him, Millie?"

"Better push his age forward as near to thirteen as possible," said aunt. "He's big for eleven, as big as some lads two years older. Lets call him twelve and a half!"

"Twelve, going on thirteen," answered my uncle.

"Yes," mused his wife, "but nearly thirteen, say thirteen about Christmas time, that would give him thirty weeks to go to school, and he would be in the mill a year from now. That will be all right."

"If we get caught at it," warned uncle, "it means prison for us, according to law."

"Never mind, let's take our chances like the

rest," answered aunt with great decision. "You tell me there aren't any ever get caught!"

"Oh," sighed uncle, "it's safe enough for that matter, though it's hard and goes against the grain to take Al from school."

"*Stop that cant!*" thundered Aunt Millie. "I won't have it. You want him to go into the mill just as bad as I do, you old hypocrite!"

"Don't flare up so," retorted uncle, doggedly. You wag too sharp a tongue. It's no use having a row over the matter. Let's dispose of the thing before bedtime."

"What else is there to settle?" asked my aunt.

"Al's got to have a new birthday." Aunt Millie laughed at the notion, and said, addressing me, "Now, Al, here's a great chance for you. What day would you like for your birthday?"

"June would do," I said.

"June *won't* do," she corrected, "the birthday has got to come in winter, near Christmas; no other time of the year is suitable. Now what part of November would you like it? We'll give you that much choice."

I thought it over for some time, for I seriously entered into the spirit of this unique opportunity of choosing my own birthday. "The twentieth of November will do, I think," I concluded.

"The twentieth of November, then, it is,"

answered my aunt. You will be thirteen, *thirteen*, next twentieth of November, mind you. You are *twelve, going on thirteen!* Don't forget that for a minute; if you do, it might get us all in jail for per-*jury!* Now, suppose that a man meets you on the streets to-morrow and asks you what your age is, what will you tell him?"

"I'm thirteen, going on —— no, I mean twelve, going on thirteen, and will be thirteen the twentieth of November!"

"Say it half a dozen times to get it fixed in your mind," said aunt, and I rehearsed it intermittently till bedtime, so that I had it indelibly fixed in my mind that, henceforth, I must go into the world and swear to a lie, abetted by my foster parents, all because I wanted to go into the mill and because my foster parents wanted me in the mill. Thus ended the night when I dropped nearly two years bodily out of my life, a most novel experience indeed and one that surely appeals to the imagination if not to the sympathy.

The following week, a few days before I was sent to the public school, we removed to a part of the city where there were not so many mill tenements, into the first floor of a double tenement. There were only two of these houses in the same yard with a grass space between them facing the highway. In this space, during

the early fall, the landlord dumped two bushels of apples every Monday morning at half past eight. It was definitely understood that only the children of the tenants should be entitled to gather the fruit. No one was allowed to be out of the house until the landlord himself gave the signal that all was ready, so we could be found, peering from the back and front doors, a quick-eyed, competitive set of youngsters, armed with pillow-slips and baskets, leaping out at the signal, falling on the heap of apples, elbowing one another until every apple was picked, when the parents would run out, settle whatever fights had started up, note with jealous eyes how much of the fruit their respective representatives had secured, all the while the amused landlord stood near his carriage shouting, "Your Harry did unusually well to-day, Mrs. Burns. He beat them all. What a pillow-slipful he got, to be sure!"

Finally I found myself in an American school. I do not know what grade I entered, but I do know that my teacher, a white-haired woman with a saintly face, showed me much attention. It was she who kept me after school to find out more about me. It was she who inquired about my moral and spiritual welfare, and when she found that I did not go to a church, mainly on account of poor clothes, she took me to the shopping district one afternoon, and with money

furnished her by a Woman's Circle, fitted me out with a brand new suit, new shoes and hat, and sent me home with the promise that I would go with her to church the following Sunday morning. In passing down a very quiet street on my solitary way to church, the next Sabbath, I came to that high picket fence behind which grew some luscious blue grapes. I clambered over the fence, picked a pocketful of the fruit, and then went on to meet my teacher at the doors of the sombre city church, where the big bell clamored high in the air, and where the carpet was thick, like a bedspread, so that people walked down the aisles silent like ghosts and as sober. It was a strange, hushed, and very thrilling place, and when the massive organ filled the place with whispering chords, I went back to my old childish faith, that angels sat in the colored pipes and sang.

My days in the school-yard were very, very strenuous, for I had always to be protecting England and the English from assault. I found the Americans only too eager to reproduce the Revolution on a miniature scale, with Bunker Hill in mind, always.

My attendance at this school had only a temporary aspect to it. When my teacher spoke to me of going to the grammar school, I replied, "Oh, I'm going in the mill in a year, please.

I want to go into the mill and earn money. It's better than books, ma'am." I had the mill in mind always. Every day finished in school was one day nearer to the mill. I judged my fellows, on the school-ground, by their plans of either going or not going into the mill as early as I.

This desire to enter the mill was more and more strengthened as the winter wore on, for then I was kept much at home and sent on the streets after wood and coal. It was impossible to pick cinders with mittens on, and especially the sort of mittens I wore—old stocking feet, doubled to allow one piece to hide the holes in its fellow. On a cold day, my fingers would get very blue, and my wrists, protruding far out of my coat-sleeves, would be frozen into numbness. Any lad who had once been in a mill would prefer it to such experiences.

My aunt kept me at home so often that she had to invent a most formidable array of excuses to send to my teacher, excuses which I had to write and carry. We never had any note-paper in the house, as there were so few letters ever written. When there was an excuse to write, I would take a crumpled paper bag, in which had been onions or sugar, or, when there were no paper bags, and the school bell was ringing, requiring haste, I would tear off a slip of the

paper in which salt pork or butter had been wrapped, and on it write some such note as this:

"Dear Miss A: This is to say that Al had to stay home yesterday for not being very well. I hope you will excuse it. Very truly yours," and my aunt would scribble her name to it, to make it authoritative.

It must have been the sameness of the notes, and their frequency, that brought the white-haired teacher to remonstrate with my aunt for keeping me away from school so much.

"He can never learn at his best," complained the teacher. "He is really getting more and more behind the others."

My aunt listened humbly enough to this complaint and then unburdened herself of her thoughts: "What do I care what he learns from books! There is coal and wood that's needed and he is the one to help out. I only let him go to school because the law makes me. If it wasn't for the law you'd not see him there, wasting his time. It's only gentlemen's sons that have time for learning from books. He's only a poor boy and ought to be earning his own living. Coal and wood is more to the point in this house than books and play. Let them play that has time and go to school that has the money. All you hear in these days is, 'School, school, school!' Now, *I* have got through all

these years without schooling, and others of my class and kind can. Why, Missis, do you know, *I* had to go into the mill when I was a slip of a girl, when I was only *seven*, there in England. I had to walk five miles to work every morning, before beginning the hard work of the day, and after working all day I had to carry my own dinner-box back that distance, and then, on top of that, there was duties to do at home when I got there. No one ever had mercy on me, and it isn't likely that I'll go having mercy on others. Who ever spoke to *me* about schooling, I'd like to know! It's only people of quality who ought to go to get learning, for its only the rich that is ever called upon to use schooling above reading. If *I* got along with it, can't this lad, I'd like to know?"

And with this argument my teacher had to be content, but she reported my absences to the truant officer, who came and so troubled my aunt, with his authority, that she sent me oftener to school after that.

About this time, at the latter end of winter, uncle removed to the region of the mill tenements again. I changed my school, also. This time I found myself enrolled in what was termed the Mill School.

As I recall it, the Mill School was a department of the common schools, in which were placed

all boys and girls who had reached thirteen and were planning to enter the mill as soon as the law permitted. If you please, it was my "finishing school." I have always considered it as the last desperate effort of the school authorities to polish us off as well as they could before we slipped out of their care forever. I am not aware of any other reason for the existence of the Mill School, as I knew it.

However, it was a very appropriate and suggestive name. It coupled the mill with the school very definitely. It made me fix my mind more than ever on the mill. Everybody in it was planning for the mill. We talked mill on the play-ground, drew pictures of mills at our desks, dreamed of it when we should have been studying why one half of a quarter is one fourth, or some similar exercise. We had a recess of our own, after the other floors had gone back into their classrooms, and we had every reason to feel a trifle more dignified than the usual run of thirteen-year-old pupils who plan to go through the grammar, the high, and the technical schools! After school, when we mixed with our less fortunate companions, who had years and years of school before them, we could not avoid having a supercilious twang in our speech when we said, "Ah, don't you wish *you* could go into the mill in a few months and earn money like *we're* going

to do, eh?" or, "Just think, Herb, I'm going to wear overalls rolled up to the knees and go barefooted all day!"

If the thumbscrew of the Inquisition were placed on me, I could not state the exact curriculum I passed through during the few months in the Mill School. I did not take it very seriously, because my whole mind was taken up with anticipations of working in the mill. But the coming of June roses brought to an end my stay there. The teacher gave me a card which certified that I had fulfilled the requirements of the law in regard to final school attendance. I went home that afternoon with a consciousness that I had grown aged suddenly. When my aunt saw the card, her enjoyment knew no bounds.

"Good for you, Al!" she exclaimed, "We'll make short work of having you in the mill now."

As I attempt to visualize myself to myself at the time of my "graduation" from the common school, I see a lad, twelve years of age and growing rapidly in stature, with unsettled, brown hair which would neither part nor be smoothed, a front tooth missing, having been knocked out by a stone inadvertently thrown while he was in swimming, a lean, lank, uncouth, awkward lad at the awkward age, with a mental furnishing which permitted him to tell with authority when America was discovered, able to draw a

half of an apple on drawing-paper, just in common fractions, able to distinguish between nouns and verbs, and a very good reader of most fearsome dime novels. The law said that I was "fitted" now to leave school and take my place among the world's workers!

But now that I was ready to enter the mill, with my school certificate in my possession, Uncle Stanwood raised his scruples again, saying regretfully enough, "Oh, Al musn't leave the school. He might never get back again, Millie." My aunt laughed cynically, and handed two letters to her husband.

"Read them, and see what you think!" she said. Uncle read the two letters, and turned very pale, for they were lawyer's letters, threatening to strip our house of the furniture and to sue us at law, if we did not bring up the back payments we owed on our clothing and our furniture! "You see, canter," scoffed aunt, "he's got to go in. There's no other help, is there!" Uncle, crushed, said, "No, there isn't. Would to God there was!" And so the matter was decided.

"In the morning you must take Al to the school committee and get his mill-papers," said my aunt, before we went to bed.

"I'll ask off from work, then," replied my uncle.

I always enjoyed being in the company of Uncle Stanwood. He was always trying to make me happy when it was in his power to do so. I knew his heart—that despite the weakness of his character, burned with great love for me. He was not, like Aunt Millie, buffeting me about, as if I were a pawn in the way. He had the kind word for me, and the desirable plan. On our walk to the school committee's office, in the heart of the city, we grew very confidential when we found ourselves beyond the keen, jealous hearing of Aunt Millie.

"That woman," he said, "stops me from being a better man, Al. You don't know, lad, how often I try to tone up, and she always does some thing to prevent my carrying it out. I suppose it's partly because she drinks, too, and likes it better than I do. Drink makes quite a difference in people, God knows! It's the stuff that kept me from being a man. Now that you're going into the mill, Al, I hope you'll not be led off to touch it. Whatever you're tempted to do, don't drink!" Then he added, "I'm a nice one to be telling you that. You see it every day, and probably will see it every day while your aunt's with me. I could leave it alone if she weren't in the house. But now we've got to be planning what we are going to do in the office that we're going to, I suppose. There's a lie in it for both

of us, Al, now that we have our foot in so far. You'll have to swear with me that you're the right, legal age, though it's a deliberate lie. My God, who would ever have thought that I'd come to it. It's jail if we're caught, lad, but we won't be caught. Don't do anything but answer questions as they're put. That will keep you from saying too much. Stand on your tip-toes, and talk deep, so that you'll seem big and old."

Finally we approached the office of the school-committee, in a dingy, wooden building, on the ground floor. A chipped tin sign was tacked underneath the glass panels of the door, and, sure of the place, we entered. We were in a narrow, carpeted hall, long and darkened, which passed before a high, bank desk, behind which sat a young man mumbling questions to a dark woman, who stood with her right hand held aloft, while a boy stood at her side trying to button his coat as fast as he could, in nervousness. There were several other boys and a few girls, seated with their parents on the settee near the wall. We found a place among them, and watched the solemn proceedings that were taking place before us, as boys and girls were questioned by the young man, vouched for by their parents, and sent off with their mill-certificates.

One by one they left us: tall Portuguese lads,

with baggy, pepper-and-salt trousers over their shoe tops, and a shine on their dark cheeks, little girls in gaudy dresses and the babyishness not yet worn off their faces; Irish lads, who, in washing up for this solemn time, had forgotten patches of dirt in their ears and on their necks; an American boy, healthy, strong, and self-confident, going to join the ranks of labor.

Then it was my turn. Uncle stood up before that perfunctory young man and began to answer questions, pinching me every now and then in warning to remember what he had said. I braced up, as well as I could, muttering to myself, "Thirteen on the twentieth of November, going on fourteen, sir!" lest, when the time came, I should make a guilty slip. My school-certificate was produced, the books were consulted, and that part of the matter ended. The clerk then looked me over for an instant, asked me a few questions which I cannot now recall, and then turned to uncle. Slowly, with hand raised to God, my uncle swore that I was "thirteen last November." In about five minutes the examination was completed. In that time there had been a hurried scratching of a pen, a flourish or two, the pressure of a blotter and a reaching out of uncle Stanwood's hand. The last barrier between me and the mill was down! The law had sanctioned my fitness for a life of

labor. Henceforth neither physician could debar me, nor clergyman nor teacher nor parent! No one seemed to have doubted my uncle's word, nor to have set a moral plumb-line against me. It had been a mere matter of question and answer, writing and signing. The law had perfunctorily passed me, and that was enough!

So we passed out of that office, my uncle grimly clutching the piece of paper for which he had perjured himself — the paper which was my warrant, consigning me to years of battling beyond my strength, to years of depression, morbidity, and over-tired strain, years to be passed in the center of depravity and de-socializing doctrine. But that was a memorable and glad moment for me, for to-morrow, maybe, I should carry my own dinner pail, and wear overalls, and work for wages!

Chapter VIII. The Keepers of the Mill Gate, Snuff Rubbing, and the Play of a Brute

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"THE first question that we have to settle," commented my aunt, when we returned home with the mill-certificate, "is, what is Al going to work at in the mill?"

"It might be well to let him go into the weave shed and learn to weave," said my uncle; "after he's learned, he might be able to run some looms and earn more than he could in any other part of the mill."

"Meanwhile, he don't draw any money while he's learning, and it takes some months, don't it?"

"Yes."

Then I interrupted, "I'd like the weave room, Aunt Millie. I want to draw as big a wage as I can."

"You shut your yap!" she retorted, angrily.

"You haven't any finger in this, mind. I say that he must get to work at something right away, that will bring in immediate wages."

"But think of the pay he'd get after he'd learned weaving, Millie," retorted my uncle; "It would make up for the time he'd spent in learning. He'd get treble what he can by taking up sweeping, in the long run!"

"Into the mill he goes," concluded my aunt, firmly, "and he goes to work at something that will pay money right off, I don't care a snap what it is!"

"That's no reason!"

"Reason," she snapped, "you speaking of reason, and here we are head over ears in debt. It's time this fellow was earning his keep."

Next neighbor to us was a family named Thomas. My aunt exchanged library books with Sarah Ann Thomas. Uncle went to the Workingmen's Club with "Matty" Thomas, and I was the boon companion of "Zippy" Thomas. When Zippy learned from me that I had secured my mill-certificate, his joy was unbounded. He gave me a broad wink, and whispered, "You had to fake it, didn't you, Al?" I nodded.

"They did mine, too! I won't tell, you know. I wish you'd come and work in the same room with me. I'm sweepin', and get three plunks a

week." Then he winked again, and said, "There's some nice girls sweepin' with me, too. Won't it be bully if you can strike it with me. They need another sweeper. One got fired this morning for boring a hole in the belt-box to get electricity on a copper wire to kill cockroaches. You could get his job if you wanted and tried." I told him to wait for me till I ran and told my uncle about it.

Uncle came out with me, and met Zippy.

"Where does the second hand live, lad?" he asked.

"He's Canadian, his name's Jim Coultier," announced Zippy. "He lives at the other end of the tenements."

We found Jim at home. No sooner was the object of our visit made known than he nodded his head, and said, "Tol' him to coom wid Sippy' morrer mornin'," whereat my uncle was so pleased that he invited the Frenchman to go out with him to Riley's saloon, to celebrate my entrance into the mill.

"So you're going to be a wage-earner, like your uncle, are you?" laughed my aunt, when I returned with the news of my success. "Run right down to the Jew's and get a pair of overalls, the blue ones, and two two-for-a-quarter towels, the rough, Turkish ones. Then come right home, and get to bed, for you'll have to

get up in good season to-morrow morning, so's to be on hand when Zippy calls for you."

The next morning I was awakened at half-past five, though it took very little to awaken me. My aunt was busy with the breakfast when I went out into the kitchen to wash my face. She turned to me with a kindness that was unusual, and said, "How many eggs shall I fry, Al? Have as many as you want this morning, you know." I said that three would do.

I came into a place of respect and honor in the family that morning. My aunt actually waited upon me, and watched me eat with great solicitude. There was toast for me, and I did not have to wait until uncle was through before I got my share of it. With no compunction whatever, I asked for a second piece of cake!

Then, while the six o'clock mill bell was giving its half-hour warning, Zippy knocked on the door, while he whistled the chorus of, "Take back your gold, for gold will never buy me!" Five minutes more were spent in listening to moral counsels from my aunt and uncle and to many hints on how to get along with the bosses, and Zippy and I went out on the street, where we joined that sober procession of mill people, which, six mornings out of seven, the whole year round, goes on its weary way towards the multitude of mills in that city.

Zippy did all he could to make my advent in the mill easy. Before we had reached the mill gates he had poured forth a volume of sage advice. Among other counsels, he said, "Now Al, if any guy tells you to go and grease the nails in the floor, just you point to your eye like this," and he nearly jabbed his forefinger into his left eye, "and you say, 'See any green there?' Don't ever go for a left-handed monkey-wrench, and don't go to the overseer after a carpet-sweeper; them's all guys, and you don't want to catch yourself made a fool of so easy. If the boss puts you to sweepin' wid me, why, I'll put you on to most of the dodges they catches a new guy wid, see!"

When we arrived at the mill gates, Zippy looked at the big tower clock, and announced, "Al, we've got twenty minutes yet before the mill starts, let's sit out here. You'll be right in the swim!" and he pointed to a line of men and boys sitting on the dirt with their backs braced against the mill fence. Either side of the gate was thus lined. Zippy and I found our places near the end of the line, and I took note of what went on. The air thereabouts was thick with odors from cigarettes and clay pipes. The boys near me aimed streams of colored expectoration over their hunched knees until the cinder walk was wet. Everybody seemed to be

borrowing a neighbor's plug of tobacco, matches, cigarette papers, or tobacco pouch. Meanwhile, the other employees trudged by. Some of the men near us would recognize, in the shawled, bent women, with the tired faces, their wives, struggling on to a day's work, and would call, jocosely, "'Ello, Sal, has't got 'ere? I thowt tha'd forgot to come. Hurry on, girl, tha's oilin' t' do!" Or the younger boys would note a pretty girl tripping by, and one would call out, "Ah, there, peachy!" The "peachy" would turn her coiffured head and make her pink lips say, "You old mutt, put your rotten tongue in your mouth, and chase yourself around the block three times!" A woman, who was no better than her reputation came into view, a woman with paint daubed on her cheeks, and that was the signal for a full venting of nasty speech which the woman met by a bold glance and a muttered, filthy curse. Girls, who were admirable in character, came by, many of them, and had to run the gauntlet, but they had been running it so long, day in and day out, that their ears perhaps did not catch the significant and suggestive things that were loudly whispered as they passed.

When at last the whistles and the bells announced five minutes before starting time, the keepers of the gate jumped up, threw away

cigarette stubs, emptied pipes, grumbled foully, took consolation from tobacco plugs, and went into the mill.

Zippy led me at a run up three flights of iron-plated stairs, through a tin-covered door, and into a spinning room. When we arrived, not a wheel was stirring. I almost slipped on the greasy floor. Up and down the length of the room the ring spinning frames were standing like orderly companies of soldiers forever on dress parade. Above, the ceiling was a tangled mass of belts, electric wires, pipes, beams, and shafting. The room was oppressively heated, and was flavored with a sort of canker breath.

As I stood there, interested in my new surroundings, the wheels began to move, almost silently, save for a slight, raspy creaking in some of the pulleys. The belts began to tremble and lap, the room was filled with a low, bee-like hum. A minute later, the wheels were whirling with such speed that the belts clacked as they turned. The hum was climbing up the scale slowly, insistently, and one could not avoid feeling sure that it would reach the topmost note soon. Then the girl spinners jumped up from the floor where they had been sitting, and went to their frames. Some pulled the levers, and tried their machines. Everybody seemed to be shouting and having a last word of gossip. The second

hand stood near the overseer's desk with his fingers stuck in his mouth. He whistled, and that was the signal for all the girls to start their frames. At last the pulleys had attained that top note in their humming, like a top, and with it were mixed screams, whistles, loud commands, the rattle of doffer's trucks, poundings, the clanking of steel on steel, and the regular day's work was begun.

Zippy had gone into the elevator room and changed his clothes. He stood near me, and I saw his lips move.

"What?" I shouted at the top of my lungs.

He laughed, and then warned, "Don't thunder so. I can hear you if you speak lower. You'll get used to hearing soon. Come with me. The boss says for me to show you where to dress."

"To dress!" At last I was to put on overalls and go barefooted! Zippy led me to the elevator room, a large, quiet place, when the thick door was shut and there were cheerful windows open, where the cool air came in. I stripped off my clothes and put on the overalls. I was ready for work. "The boss wants to see your certificate," announced Zippy.

The overseer was a Canadian, like the second hand. He had his feet on the desk, and was engrossed in the *Morning Mercury* when I reached him. He turned around with a terrific

I Was Given a Broom, and then I Found Myself alone with Mary

speed on his swivel chair, when we came up to him, and enquired, somewhat kindly, "Well?"

"Please, sir," I began, "I come to work — to sweep. Jim Coultier told me to come last night!"

"Take him to Jim. Don't bother me," grumbled the overseer. "Jim will settle it."

Jim did settle it. He took my certificate and gave it to the overseer, and then told me to follow him to the other end of the mill. In a cupboard was a great supply of new brooms, waste, and oil cups. He took out a broom, spread it wide, and gave it to me.

"Two a week," he said, "no more." Then he turned to Zippy, and said, "Show him whar for to do!"

Zippy, no doubt bursting with importance with all this supervision, led me to an open space in the middle of the long room, where, sitting near some waste boxes, were two girls, barefooted, about my own age. Zippy led me right up to them, and with a wave of the hand announced, "Girls, this here's Al Priddy. This is Mary, and t'other's Jane. Come on, girls, it's time to go around the mill before the boss sees us."

But just then the second hand caught us grouped there, and stormed, angrily, "Get to work!"

Mary was a very strong girl of thirteen, with a cheery, fat face. She had been in the mill a half year, and was learning to spin during her spare time. I noticed that her teeth were yellow, and with a bluntness that I did not realize I said to her, when she had taken me to show me how to sweep, "What makes your teeth so yellow, Mary?"

She laughed, and then said, confidentially, "I chew snuff. I'm learning from the older girls."

"Chew snuff?"

She nodded, "I'm rubbing, you see," and we sat down while she showed me what she meant. She took a strip of old handkerchief from her apron, and a round box of snuff. She powdered the handkerchief with the snuff, and then rubbed it vigorously on her teeth.

"I like it," she announced. "It's like you boys when you chew tobacco, only this is the girl's way."

My work required little skill and was soon mastered. I had to sweep the loose cotton from the floor and put it in a can. Then there were open parts of stationary machinery to clean and a little oiling of non-dangerous parts. This work did not take more than two-thirds of the ten and a half hours in the work day. The remainder of the time, Zippy, the girls, and

I spent in the elevator room, where the doffers also came for a rest.

I had occasion to get very well acquainted with two of the doffers that first day. Their names were "Mallet" and "Curley," two French Canadians. Mallet was a lithe, sallow-faced, black-haired depreciator of morals, who fed on doughnuts, and spent most of his wages in helping out his good looks with the aid of the tailor, the boot-maker, and the barber. He came to the mill dressed in the extreme of fashion, and always with his upper lip curled, as if he despised every person he passed — save the good-looking girls. Curley was Mallet's antithesis in everything but moral ignorance. He was a towering brute, with a child's, yes, less than a child's, brain. He ran to muscle. He could outlift the strongest man in the mill without increasing his heart-beat. His chief diversions were lifting weights, boasting of his deeds with weights in contests of the past, and the recital of filthy yarns in which he had been the chief actor.

That afternoon of my first day in the mill, Mallet and Curley shut themselves in the elevator room with Zippy and me.

"Ah," drawled Mallet, noticing me, as if for the first time, "who tol' you for to come here, eh?"

"Because I want to," I retorted.

"Curley," he called to the brute, who was grinning at me, "gif heem a chew, eh?"

The brute nodded in glee, and pulled out a black plug of tobacco and handed it me.

"You take a big, big chew!" he commanded. I threw the plug on the floor and stoutly declared, "I won't." Both of the companions laughed, and came over to where I sat. Curley pinned me helplessly to the floor, while Mallet stuffed the piece of tobacco in my mouth that he had hastily cut off from the plug. Then Curley took an excruciating grip on one of my fingers so that by a simple pressure it seemed as if the finger would snap.

"You chew, or I brak it," he glared down on me. I refused, and had to suffer intolerable agony for a minute. Then the brute bent his face close to mine, with his foul mouth over my eyes.

"I spit in your eye if you do not chew," he announced, as he looked off for a second, and then with his mouth fixed he bent over me, and I had to chew.

In a short time I was deathly sick. This accomplished, the giant gave me up until he got to his feet, then he took me in his arms, as he would have taken a child, and carried me out into the spinning room for the girls to laugh at.

"Dis man try for to chew plug," announced

Mallet. "Now heem seek. Oh! oh!" Then I was carried to the third hand, a friend of the doffers, and Mallet announced, "You'd best fire dis kid. Heem chew and get seek, boss." The third hand scowled at me, and said, "Cut it out, kid, if you stay here."

When I went home at the end of the day, aunt asked me what sort of a day I'd had. "Oh," I said, "when I know the ropes it will be pretty fair." I was thinking of the three dollars I should get the second week. I said nothing about the tobacco incident. When I sat down to supper, I could not eat. My aunt remarked, "Don't let it take your appetite away, Al, lad. It takes strength to work in the mill."

"I'm not hungry," I said, and I was not; for, before my imagination, there rose up the persecuting figures of Mallet and Curley, and I could still taste the stinging flavor of the plug.

Chapter IX. A Factory Fashion-plate, the Magic Shirt Bosom, and Wise Counsel on How to Grow Straight

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THE ring-spinning room is generally the center of fashion in a cotton-mill. The reason may be that the ring-spinners, at least in New England, are generally vivacious French-Canadian girls. There were some in the mill where I began work, who possessed an inordinate thirst for ornament and dress. The ring-spinners had clean surroundings and much easier work than their sisters in the weave-shed. Their labor was more genteel than that of their sisters in the carding-room.

Marie Poisson, who ran frames which I cleaned and oiled, was the leader of fashion in the room, and well she was fitted for it. She resembled a sunflower on a dandelion stalk; she was statuesque even in working-dress, and when you saw

her hands you wondered how she ever got through the day without gloves. She lived on doughnuts, frosted cake, cold meats, and pickles, in order that her board bill might remain small and allow her a good percentage of her wages for dress. She had huge coiffures in all the latest styles, and when the little artistic dabs of powder were absent, her face had a lean and hungry look. Marie was a splendid specimen of compressed humanity: she must have suffered the tortures of the inquisition, for what tiny high-heeled shoes she took off and hid in the waste can, near the coat hooks! How many times a day did I see her pressing her hands to her waist as if to unbind herself and get a good gulp of air! How stiff her neck from its daily imprisonment in a high, starched collar! At that time, a certain dainty, mincing, doubled-up walk was affected by the fashionable society women of the country, a gait which was characterized as "The Kangaroo Walk!" The young ladies had to go in training for this fashion, had to adjust the body and the general carriage to a letter S mould, before the mincing daintiness could be shown. Marie was the first in the spinning-room to attain this goal. Her success inspired even such humble imitators as Mary and Jane to mould themselves, by daily posturings and prancings, in a wild effort to attain the same end.

The inevitable result of so much pride and fashion in the girls was to make the young men and boys pay strict attention to themselves; for so the mixing of the sexes tends everywhere, even in a mill. Probably Mallet, with his excessive vanities, had been produced through such contact. In any case, such fashion plates as I saw were merely contrasts which brought out my own insufficiencies. The first sign of this influence came in my purchase of a ten-cent celluloid rose which had a perfumed sponge in its heart, which could be filled over and over again when the scent had evaporated. I had a ten-cent bottle, large size, of Jockey Club for this purpose, which I also spilled over my handkerchiefs and clothes, and went to the mill leaving a perfumed trail behind me. As I could not swagger in such glaring and costly shirts as Mallet wore, several changes in a week, I bought from a fakir, one Saturday night, a wonderful shirt bosom, for ten cents! It permitted the wearer *instantly* to change the pattern of his shirt bosom twelve times, ranging all the way from a sober ministerial white, going through the innocent and inoffensive tints and checks, and at last reaching the vivid, startling gambler's stripes and dots! These marvelous effects were very simply brought about. The Magic Bosom, as it was called, was a circular piece of stiff pasteboard

on either side of which were pasted six segments of enameled paper, shaped like letter V's, just large enough to fit behind the lapels of the vest. There were six turns of the circle for six patterns on one side, and then, by merely turning the whole thing around, the other six effects were possible. The only trouble was, I did not wear a vest in the mill, and so could only use it to and from the mill, to the theater, where I changed it during every act, and took care that others should notice the magic transformation. I wore it to a Sunday school that I attended intermittently, and astonished my classmates by six transformations during the hour's session!

Then I began to contrast my own hair with Mallet's black and orderly curls. His hair always shone, and the barber kept it from growing down below the ear! That disturbed me, for neither comb nor brush could part mine or make it stay down. I was so disturbed over the matter that I confided in my aunt. She laughed, and said that she had a recipe that would satisfy me. She sent me down to a butcher shop for a large-sized marrow bone. Then she had me produce my large-sized bottle of Jockey Club. After boiling the marrow bone in water for two hours, she made me extract the marrow. Then I had to put in a certain amount of perfume and give the whole a good stirring. Aunt next produced

a cold-cream jar, and put the decoction in and let it cool over night.

In the morning she said, "Now, Al, that's a jar of the best hair grease you could buy for money anywhere. It's an old recipe and will not only make the hair stay in place but is, at the same time, good for it. It makes the hair grow, and keeps it in good condition. True enough it had a good odor to it, and *was* smooth like the stuff the barber put on my head when he cut my hair. I rubbed some on my head that morning, and not only did I have the satisfaction of seeing my hair shine, like Mallet's, but it also stayed parted in the middle! I went to the mill that morning, with my cap balanced on the back of my head, so that everybody could see the shine and the parting. But I had not been in the mill long before the pomade evaporated, my hair sprang loose, and I was as badly off as before. By bringing the jar into the mill I managed to remedy that, and got along very well until one of the doffers rubbed his palm over my head, discovered the grease, sniffed it, and told all over the room that I was daubing bear's grease on my hair to keep it down.

These items of self-consciousness, so momentous to me at the time, were some of the signs of adolescence. I was growing very rapidly, and my whole self was in a whirl of change. Every

bone seemed to have sprung loose, every muscle seemed to be expanding at once, all my strength seemed to have left my body! My bones were sore and every muscle ached. An infinite weariness and dizziness took possession of me, day and night. Sitting or standing I could find no rest. When I bent down, I suffered undue pain; when I reached for anything, I had to drop my arms before I had attained the object. I suffered as if jackscrews had been laid at all angles in my body, and were being turned and turned day and night without any stop. I could not bend and reach under the frames to clean them without excruciating pain sweeping over me, and a cold sweat. If I took hold of a broom, and tried to sweep, I had to drag the broom wearily after the first few moments. I went home after the day's work as tired as if I had been holding up the world all day. And though I went to bed soon after supper, and slept soundly till the morning, I awoke as tired as if I had been toiling at a slave's task every minute of the night.

I tried, in no complaining spirit, to describe my feelings to my aunt. "Why, they're nothing but growing pains, Al," she said. "You ought to feel proud that you're going to be a tall man. It'll pass. You must get all the rest you can by going to bed right after supper. That'll help!"

But she never said, as I wanted her to say, "Get off from work while you're suffering so, and don't try to work while you're in that condition."

During this period, I grew to be supersensitive and self-conscious. I had a high, shrill voice, of which I was not aware till a doffer mimicked it one day. It was a small matter to him, but to me it was tragical. It wore on my imagination all through that day, it haunted me that night, it intruded itself on my solitude until I inwardly cried and grew depressed.

"What's ailing you, lad?" commented my uncle the next morning. "You look as if you'd lost your best friend?" But I would not unburden myself of the load of guilty feeling that was on my shoulders—guilt, because my voice was high, shrill, and childish! I was afraid to meet people whom I knew on the street, and when I saw one I knew coming towards me, I would dash to the opposite side, or, if escape like that were impossible, I would turn towards a shop-window or pretend to be interested in a bit of dirt on a curbstone.

Mark Waterhouse, an old crippled Englishman, who ran the elevator and with whom I talked often while in the elevator-room, seemed to understand me thoroughly when I told him how I felt.

"Aye, lad," he said, "it's growing tha' art. Growing swift, too: tall like a bullrush. It's bad for thee to be in this 'ot room an' working. Tha' needs fresh hair; lots on't. Lots o' fresh hair to get in th' blood an' bone, like."

"But aunt won't let me stay at home," I said.

"Aye," grumbled the old man with a slow nod of his head, "they all say it. Th'll do that. It's the way o' th' mill, lad, an' we're born to 't. You con put a plank ower a rose bush while the shoots'r young an' growing, and the shoots'll turn aside, go crook'd, get twisted, but the bush will grow, lad, spite o' the plank. This work and bad air's the plank on top o' ye, but yeu'll grow, spite on't. Yeu'll grow, for God started ye growing an' ye can't stop God. But yeu'll grow bent at' shoulders, legs'll twist, feet'll turn, knees'll bend in! Sure's ye live, they will. See me, lad," he said, "the plank was on top o' me, too. I went int' mill at nine, an' worked 'ard for a babby, I did! Con I walk straight? See me," and he went at a pathetic hobble across the room, one knee turned in, the other foot twisted out of joint. "That's t' way it took me, lad, when I was in your shoes. I'm not t' only one, either. Th' mills full on 'em! Do I freighten ye, lad? Never mind. Do your best, spite on't. I tell ye what! Stretch your arms mony times through t' day. Oxercise!

Oxercise! Stretch thy muscles, thy legs, an' get all the chance tha con so tha'll grow spite on't. Spite o' work, bad air an' all! Strengthen thasel', lad. Don't let twists, knots, an' bends coom!"

This old man's counsel made a deep impression on me. In terror of the things he described, and which he himself was, I made up my mind that I would not let my body get bent, crooked, or distorted, so I did as he said. I stretched myself to my full height many times a day. I exercised with weights and broom handles, even though I found it very painful. I gulped in the fresh air when out of the mill, and walked with my chest thrust out, a stiff, self-conscious, growing lad, fighting ever against the impending tragedy of a deformed body.

Chapter X. "Peter One-Leg-and-a-Half" and His Optimistic Whistlers

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BY the middle of the following winter, I had entered fully into all the privileges that were mine by virtue of my labor in the mill. The background of all my privileges was the spending money my aunt gave me. She apportioned me money on a basis which kept me constantly at work. I was given ten cents on every dollar that I brought home. This made me ambitious for advance. It made me keep at work even when I should have been at home on a sick bed. It drove "loafing days" out of my mind entirely, for spending money was the *summun bonum* of my existence. The kind of things I craved, the only things I found real pleasure in, cost money.

I attended the ten-cent shows in the theater on Saturday afternoons. I looked forward throughout the week to a glass of hot beef-tea at the soda fountain. I would smack my lips long in anticipation of two-for-five cream puffs

or a five-cent pork pie. They meant fully as much to me, then, as did the Horse Show or a Paris gown to the aspiring daughter of one of the mill stockholders.

Intermittently, I used to go to the business section of the city alone, and stop at Cheap John's, the tobacconist's, for a treat of second-hand novels. There was a squat, gaudily decorated Punch standing in front of Cheap John's, with a handful of chocolate cigars always extended to the passers-by. Punch's jester's cap, with the bells over his left ear, his hooked nose and upturned chin, always with a fixed grin on his shiny face, always seemed a human goblin, saying, "Come in, and have one on me!"

The interior of Cheap John's was like a country fair Midway. There were weight machines, moving pictures, slot instruments, lung testers, name-plate makers, guessing machines, card-wheels, pool-tables, racing bulletins, sport scores, displays of sporting apparatus, of tobacco specialties, of colored sporting posters, hat-cleaning wheels, clothes-cleaning tables, shoe-blacking alcoves, and a long counter on which were heaped rows on rows of highly colored, second-hand Wild West, Sport, Adventure, and Detective romances: a bundle of them for ten cents! A bundle of these I would purchase, listen to the men's voices that came from the dense clouds

of smoke, and then I would race home, a distance of a mile, to examine more closely the prizes of the night.

The next day being Sunday, I had the privilege of staying in bed, of having my breakfast brought to me, much as if I had been a convalescent gentleman. My aunt would find me propped up in bed, with the novels spread over the bed; and in the midst of a detective romance, always read first, I would be interrupted by some such words as these: "Well, his royal highness! Will he have bacon and eggs and a hot cup of cocoa?" I would merely keep on reading, with a suppressed, growled "Yep!" and after breakfast, though it would be a pleasant day outside, I would sit there in bed and read until I became satiated with thrills, disguised scouts, burgled safes, triumphant, last-chapter endings of "Justice at last!" reunited lovers and pardoning fathers, when I would dress, have dinner, and go out into a slumberous Sabbath afternoon, to stand bored on a street corner until dark, when the gangs of the city moved and planned exciting escapades.

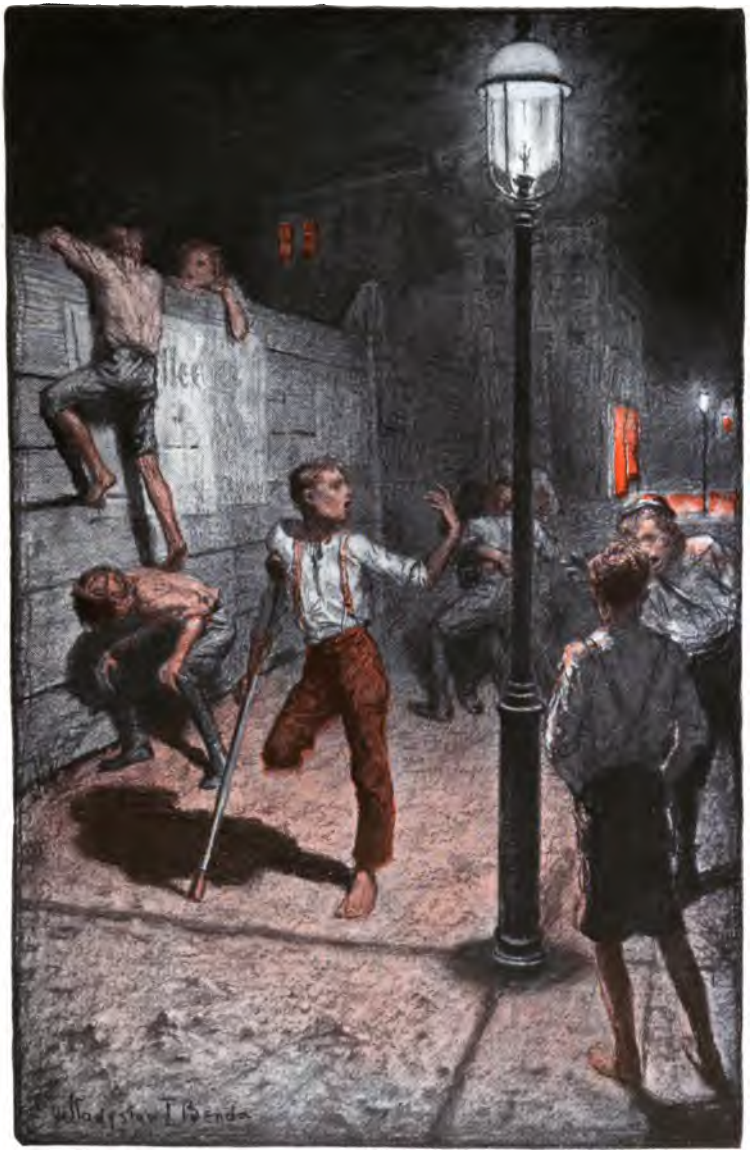
When my uncle saw me reading the novels, he interposed with, "That's cheap stuff, Al, and will never make you any better. You want to read refining things, the great books. There's many an exciting one that is exciting without

being cheap. I wish you would let me plan for you." I told him that I would — sometime. but I kept on reading Cheap John's bargain-counter literature.

The ten and a half hours in the mill, with its humdrum rattle, its high-pitched hum, the regularity of its fixtures, the monotonousness of its routine, bullied my nerves into a tamed, cowed stare. Day by day, day by day, day by day, at the appointed time, in the instructed way, with the same broom or the same-sized bunch of waste, to do the task! And there wanted to stir in me a schoolboy's expression of vitality, a growing lad's satisfaction in novelty! But all through the hours of light, from morning till evening, with the sun arising and departing, I had to listen to, and keep time with, the humming of wheels!

Consequently, when my feet felt the outside world at night or on Saturdays, at the first refreshing feel of the pure air which took that deep-lodged heat from my white cheeks, I always promised myself some exciting pleasure ere the day passed, to stimulate my cowed nerves and make me a boy again.

So I fell heart and soul into the scheme of a group of other boys who worked in the mill and lived near me. It was my first membership in a "gang." It was presided over by a sturdy



"PETER-ONE-LEG-AND-A-HALF" LED US AT NIGHT OVER HIGH BOARD FENCES

young Irishman, who, because he had lost a leg below the knee, was nicknamed, "Peter One-Leg-and-a-Half." Peter worked in the mill, and examined cloth in the weave room. He thrilled our jaded nerves very successfully. We had ghost-play at night on the street, when he would spit fire, make phosphorescent writing on a tenement, lead a line of sheeted figures soberly in review through the night, and close the performance by hurling a battery of bad eggs at us, his admiring audience. Peter was King of the Night. He seemed to have the sight of a cat and the cunning of a fox. He led us at night over high board-fences, on the other side of which, in the dark, we would almost choke ourselves against tight clotheslines. He taught us organized play, and, wise gang-leader which he unconsciously was, he changed our adventures and diversions so often that no complaints were made, and night time, with Peter in it, became the thrilling objective during my winter work.

For a short season, in the winter, the whole gang joined the club, which was kept for mill-boys and was supported by the corporation for which I worked. There were work-benches, checker-rooms, a poorly equipped gymnasium, seemingly always in the possession of the adults, and every now and then an entertainment occurred, when some imported entertainer with

talent would be invited to come from his or her aristocratic home—with a group of "slummers," usually and divert us. We thought most of them very tame, resented the manual training department because we thought ten hour's work sufficient for one day, and got what pleasure we could from the entertainments. One man told us, among other things in a memorable address, to "whistle when you're happy and whistle when you're in danger of feeling mad. Whistling gives courage, like yells at a football game. Whistle, boys, whistle. It's a sign that your courage is good!" That point impressed itself on Peter, too, for when we left the club that night at nine o'clock (to stay on the streets till ten), he lined us up like soldiers in review, and thus addressed us, "Company halt all ready, whistle!" We put our fingers in our mouths and produced a profusion of vibrant whistles, which indicated that we were the most courageous and happy lads in the world. Then Peter, stumping ahead, led us militantly up a street, stooping every now and then under a street lamp to call out, "All the happy ones whistle, you!"

Chapter XI. Esthetic Adventures made possible by a Fifteen-Dollar Piano

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That was a prohibition year in city politics, and the tenement thirst was pronounced to be "something awful!" Desperate men were compelled to go away on holidays and Saturdays to get what refreshment they could. The police were on keen watch for illegal selling. They were making daily raids in different parts of the city. Liquors had been found in cellars, hidden under the floors, in flasks buried in the bodies of huge codfish, water-pipes had been cut off

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from the main pipes and tapped to barrels of whisky and beer; every trick possible to the imagination seemed to have been uncovered, yet my aunt undertook to let some chosen throats in the neighborhood know that she planned to keep a supply of intoxicants on hand.

I was asked, at night, to take a pint of whiskey here and there to some shut-in woman like Old Burnt Jane, a cripple from a fire, who always let tears fall in the food she was cooking as she said: "Wait, wait, little boy, dearie. I'll get my mon-ey when I've got this taste of cheese off; wait like a good little boy!"

Our customers, who came for a drink at any time, had a secret sign whereby they could ask for intoxicants without mentioning them by name. On Sundays, our kitchen would be filled with men and women having their thirsts quenched. My Aunt Millie rubbed her hands with satisfaction over the prosperous business she did.

But one Sunday afternoon there came three plain-clothes men to the shop. The alarm had been given, and Aunt Millie waited for the raid with no outward traces of fear. There were some people at the rear of the house, and they were engaged in a very busy, "manufactured" conversation about "Charley's throat trouble" when the officers came in the back to investigate. If they sniffed the air for traces of whisky,

they only got a superabundance of "mint" and "musk," "lozengers" half thrown into the customers' mouths by Aunt Millie. A "complete" investigation was made, covering the back-yard, the cellar, the kitchen, the counter, and the bedrooms, but no illegal wares were found, and the officers left the shop in chagrin. As they left, my Aunt Millie bent her fond gaze towards a row of black bottles that stood in a row in the display window, marked, "Ginger," "Spruce," and "Birch."

"You dear creatures," she cried, "what a salvation you are!" Whereat, she took one to the back room, uncorked it, and poured out a noggin of whiskey apiece for each of her customers, and the "throat trouble" gave way to a discussion of, "What tasty stuff it is, this whiskey!"

Shortly after this, my uncle was discharged for staying out from work one morning, after a night of intoxication, and he finally secured a new position in the South End. Rather than have the fuss of going to his work on the street-cars, he rented a house, and we removed. This house was a cottage, the first one we had lived in since coming to America. It stood on a street corner, near a wide square, where the thousands of cyclists came after supper for road races, "runs," and a circle around the neck

of land which jutted out into Buzzards Bay. Ours was the show place of that neighborhood; from the branches of the rotting cherry tree in the front yard, I could watch the crowds come and go, without the trouble of going away from the house. Directly opposite us, buried in a maze of maple branches, with a high-fenced yard back of it, stood an Orphan's Home. The street-car line terminated in front of our door. It was, to me, a very aristocratic neighborhood indeed. I felt somewhat puffed up about it. There were several saloons within a few minute's walk. My aunt regarded that as a feature not to be despised. She had explained to uncle: "You see we can get it in cans, and not have to go and sit away from home and all its comforts."

This change of residence meant also a change of work for me. I left the spinning-room, left Curley, Mallet, Mary, Zippy, and the others, and went into the mule-room to learn back-boying with my uncle.

The mule-room is generally the most skilled section of a cotton-mill. Its machinery is more human in its action than is a loom, or a carding machine, or a ring-spinning frame. There are no women or girls in a mule-spinning room. Men spin the yarn, and boys attend to the wants of the machines as back-boys, tubers, and doffers.

One Saturday afternoon, shortly after we had

settled in our new home, aunt and uncle went cityward, entered a music store, and said, "We want to look over a piano."

The clerk immediately took them in the direction of the high-priced, latest models.

"No," said aunt, "them's not the ones we want to buy. Mister, you haven't got something cheaper, have you?"

"How cheap?" asked the clerk.

"Well," said my aunt, "I shouldn't care to go very high. Say a second-hander."

The clerk took them to the rear of the store, to a dim corner. Here he turned on the light, and showed a row of table-pianos. Aunt and uncle stopped before one of them, a scratched, faded veteran, of many concert-hall and ballroom experiences. Its keys were yellow, with black gaps where some were missing. One of the pedal rods was broken off, while the other was fastened with thin wire. Uncle, with professional nonchalance, whirled a creaky stool to the desired height, sat down, turned back his cuffs, and struck a handful of chords, like a warhorse in battle again, with a vivid reminiscence of old English public-house days. There came from the depths of the aged lyre a tinkling, tinpannish strain of mixed flats.

"It's real good," smiled my aunt.

"It needs tuning," commented the clerk.

"How much is it worth, tuned?" asked my uncle.

"Fifteen dollars," announced the clerk.

"On time, how much?" asked aunt eagerly. "We can only put in three dollars on this at first," she said.

"Fifteen dollars on credit, at your own terms," said the clerk, after a brief consultation with the manager in the office. "We need the room, and will be glad to get it out of the way." "It's ours, then," said my uncle. "Send it down as soon as you get it tuned," he directed.

When they told me about the purchase, uncle announced, "It will keep me at home, I hope, and away from the saloons. It will be fine to get to playing again. I miss it so. I must be all out of practise."

When the piano did come, and it was established in the front room, I spent a whole evening in fingering it. There was only one defect about it, — when uncle played a tune, one of the keys had a fault of sticking, so that he had to lift it bodily into place, and that somewhat broke in on the melody he was engaged on.

"But what can you expect for fifteen dollars," he commented, philosophically. "When folks are singing with it, I can skip it, an' it won't be noticed much."

The advent of the piano made my days in the

mill lighter to bear. My uncle had proposed to teach me to play on it at night if I would practise faithfully. He took pains to elaborate the truth that great musicians, who had come to fame in the earth, had done so only at the cost of infinite pains in practise.

"Never mind," I responded, "I'll learn, sure enough, and I may give lessons some day." So, during work hours, I was given the scale to memorize.

"F,a,c,e, is the name of the spaces," he taught. "Face, it spells; you can remember that." Then he had me memorize the notes on the lines, and then he let me try it on the piano, a night of joy to me. Day after day I would plan for these practises, and in three regular lessons, of two weeks' duration, I had the joy of grinding out my first real four-part tune. I had been practising laboriously, with a strict regard for exact time, the selection he had set before me, when he called from the kitchen, "Hurry up the tune a bit, Al!" I did, and I was bewildered to find that the chaotic tangle of notes resolved itself, when played faster, into the simple, universal melody, "Home, Sweet Home!"

But I found not enough patience, after being in the mill all day, to isolate myself every night in the house when there was fresh air to enjoy

outside, so I told uncle that I had better give up taking lessons. I could not keep them up. I wanted the fresh air more.

But uncle was loath for me to do that. "I want you to do something else besides work in the mill," he remonstrated. About this time, I became acquainted with Alf Martin, a back-boy, who was playing the piano. His father worked on the mules next to my uncle. The two men talked the matter over, and one day Alf told me that the woman he was taking lessons from, a Miss Flaffer, had said she would give me fifty-cent lessons for thirty-five cents! My uncle said he would pay half of the cost, and in spite of my previous abandonment of music, I succumbed to this scheme, secretly, in my heart, glad of the opportunity of taking lessons from so fine a lady as Alf told me Miss Flaffer was.

"When you pay for lessons," said my uncle, "you'll think more of them. I could only take you as far as vamping, and you want to do more than that."

Previous to this, I had gotten as much joy, during the week's work, from anticipations of cream puffs, pork pies, and such minor Saturday joys, but now I had a piano lesson, a real music-lesson, to engage my mind, and that was a very cheerful week spent behind the mules. Alf and

I spent much time, when we could get away from the eyes of the bosses, talking over Miss Flaffer, and I came to understand that she was a fine woman indeed.

The following Saturday afternoon, then, I took my *Beginner's Book*, tied it in a roll and fastened it with twine, and went on the street car to a very aristocratic part of the city. It was the part where, on first landing in America, I had gone on summer days, asking at the back doors if I might pick the pears that had fallen to the lawns from the trees.

Miss Flaffer's house was a very small cottage, with a small piazza at its front, and with a narrow lawn, edged by a low fence, running around it. It was altogether a very pretty place, with its new paint, its neat windows, and the flowers between the curtains. The front steps had evidently never been trodden on by foot of man, for why did they shine so with paint! There was not a scratch on the porch, nor a pencil mark. I looked at the number, at the engraved door-plate, and found that "S. T. Flaffer" did reside within. A great, cold perspiration dripped from me as I put a trembling finger on the push-button. I heard an answering bell somewhere in the depths of the house, and then wished that I might run away. It seemed so bold a thing for me, a mill-boy, to be intruding myself on

such aristocratic premises. But I could not move, and then Miss Flaffer herself opened the door!

Oh, dream of neatness, sweetness, and womanly kindness! Miss Flaffer was that to me at the moment. She was a picture, that put away my aunt and all the tenement women who came into our house for beer-drinking, put them away from memory entirely. I thought that she would send me home, and tell me to look tidy before I knocked at her door, or that I had made a mistake, and that such a woman, with her white hands, could not be giving thirty-five cent piano lessons to Al Priddy, a mill-boy!

Oh, how awkward, self-conscious, and afraid I felt as I went across that threshold and looked on comforts that were luxuries to me! There was a soft, loose rug on a hardwood, polished floor, on which, at first, I went on a voyage half-way, when the crumpled rug half tripped me and I caught desperately at a fragile chair and half wrenched it from position to stay myself, yet Miss Flaffer did not scold me, nor did she seem to notice me. Then, as we went through a luxurious dining-room (where they did nothing but eat meals!), I found myself bringing my foot down on the train of Miss Flaffer's dress. Yet, when the confusion was over, she never made a single reference to it, though I felt that I ought

to ask her if I had torn it. She led me to a little studio, where, in a curtained alcove, stood a black upright piano polished like a mirror, and before it a stool, which did not squeak like ours when turned into position.

When the preliminary examination was over, and I was seated at the piano, Miss Flaffer asked me to play "Home, Sweet Home" as I had learned under my uncle's instruction. I had been so used to the hard, mechanical working of uncle's instrument that I naturally pounded unduly on Miss Flaffer's, until she politely and graciously said, "Please do not raise your fingers so high," and to that end, she placed two coppers on my hand, and told me to play the tune without letting them drop.

After the tune, and while Miss Flaffer had left the room to get her notebook, I noted with chagrin that my perspiring fingers had left marks on the snowy keyboard where they would surely be seen. I listened, and heard Miss Flaffer rummaging among some books, and then desperately spat on my coat cuff and rubbed the keyboard vigorously until I thought that I had obliterated the traces of my fingers. Then Miss Flaffer returned, and I tried to act unconcernedly by whistling, under my breath, "After the Ball."

By the time the lesson was over, it was raining

outside, and Miss Flaffer said, "I have to go to the corner of the next street, Albert. (Albert!) I want you to share my umbrella with me so that you will not get wet."

I mumbled, "All right, I don't care if I do," and prepared to go. Before we had left the house I had put on my hat twice and opened and shut the door once in my extreme excitement. Then we went out, and there rushed to my mind, from my reading, the startling question, "How to act when walking on the street with a fine woman, and there is an umbrella?" I said, when we were on the sidewalk, "Please let me carry that," and pointed to the umbrella. "Certainly," she said, and handed it to me. Before we had attained the corner, I had managed to poke the ends of the umbrella ribs down on Miss Flaffer's hat, and to knock it somewhat askew. I found, also, that I was shielding myself to such an extent as to leave Miss Flaffer exposed to the torrents of rain. On the street corner, she took the umbrella, and, as my car came into view, she said, "Good-by, Albert. You did very well to day. Practise faithfully, and be sure to come next week." I called, "So long," and ran for the car.

I only took two other lessons from Miss Flaffer. I never had the manners to send her word that I could no longer afford them. I

was afraid that she would offer to teach me free, and I could not stand the confinement to the house after a hard day in the mill. But I had learned something besides piano-playing with her. I had seen fine manners contrasted against my own uncouth ways. I had seen a dustless house contrasted against my own ill-kept home. I had been called Albert!

Chapter XII. Machinery and Manhood

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MY work in the spinning-room, in comparison with my new work in the mule-room, had been mere child's play. At last the terror of the mill began to blacken my life. The romance, the glamour, and the charm were gone by this only a daily dull, animal-like submission to hard tasks had hold of me now.

Five days of the week, at the outer edge of winter, I never stood out in the daylight. I was a human mole, going to work while the stars were out and returning home under the stars. I saw none of the world by daylight, except the staring walls, high picket-fences, and drab tenements of that immediate locality. The sun rose and set on the wide world outside, rose and set five times a week, but I might as well have been in a grave; there was no exploration abroad.

The mule-room atmosphere was kept at from eighty-five to ninety degrees of heat. The hard-wood floor burned my bare feet. I had

to gasp quick, short gasps to get air into my lungs at all. My face seemed swathed in continual fire. The tobacco chewers expectorated on the floor, and left little pools for me to wade through. Oil and hot grease dripped down behind the mules, sometimes falling on my scalp or making yellow splotches on my overalls or feet. Under the excessive heat my body was like a soft sponge in the fingers of a giant; perspiration oozed from me until it seemed inevitable that I should melt away at last. To open a window was a great crime, as the cotton fiber was so sensitive to wind that it would spoil. (Poor cotton fiber!) When the mill was working, the air in the mule-room was filled with a swirling, almost invisible cloud of lint, which settled on floor, machinery, and employees, as snow falls in winter. I breathed it down my nostrils ten and a half hours a day; it worked into my hair, and was gulped down my throat. This lint was laden with dust, dust of every conceivable sort, and not friendly at all to lungs.

There are few prison rules more stringent than the rules I worked under in that mule room. There are few prisoners watched with sterner guards than were the bosses who watched and ordered me from this task to that.

There was a rule against looking out of a window. The cotton mills did not have opaque

glass or whitewashed windows, then. There was a rule against reading during work-hours. There was a rule preventing us from talking to one another. There was a rule prohibiting us from leaving the mill during work-hours. We were not supposed to sit down, even though we had caught up with our work. We were never supposed to stop work, even when we could. There was a rule that anyone coming to work a minute late would lose his work. The outside watchman always closed the gate the instant the starting whistle sounded, so that anyone unfortunate enough to be outside had to go around to the office, lose time, and find a stranger on his job, with the prospect of being out of work for some time to come.

For the protection of minors like myself, two notices were posted in the room, and in every room of the mill. They were rules that represented what had been done in public agitation for the protection of such as I: rules which, if carried out, would have taken much of the danger and the despair from my mill life. They read:

"The cleaning of machinery while it is in motion is positively forbidden!"

"All Minors are hereby prohibited from working during the regular stopping hours!"

If I had insisted on keeping the first law, I should not have held my position in the mule

[illegible] than two days. The mule-spinners [illegible] their wages depended [illegible] in motion, conse- [illegible] by a sort of [illegible] all the cleaning [illegible] machines were in [illegible] when they were [illegible] or before the [illegible]. If a back-boy [illegible] stopped while he did [illegible] at, and told to go to [illegible] with his "nerve." I [illegible] incapable had I de- [illegible] machinery be stopped for me. [illegible] have merely said, "Wait till [illegible]

[illegible] work during the stopping [illegible] have been asked to quit [illegible] spinner could have made it impos- [illegible] retain my position.

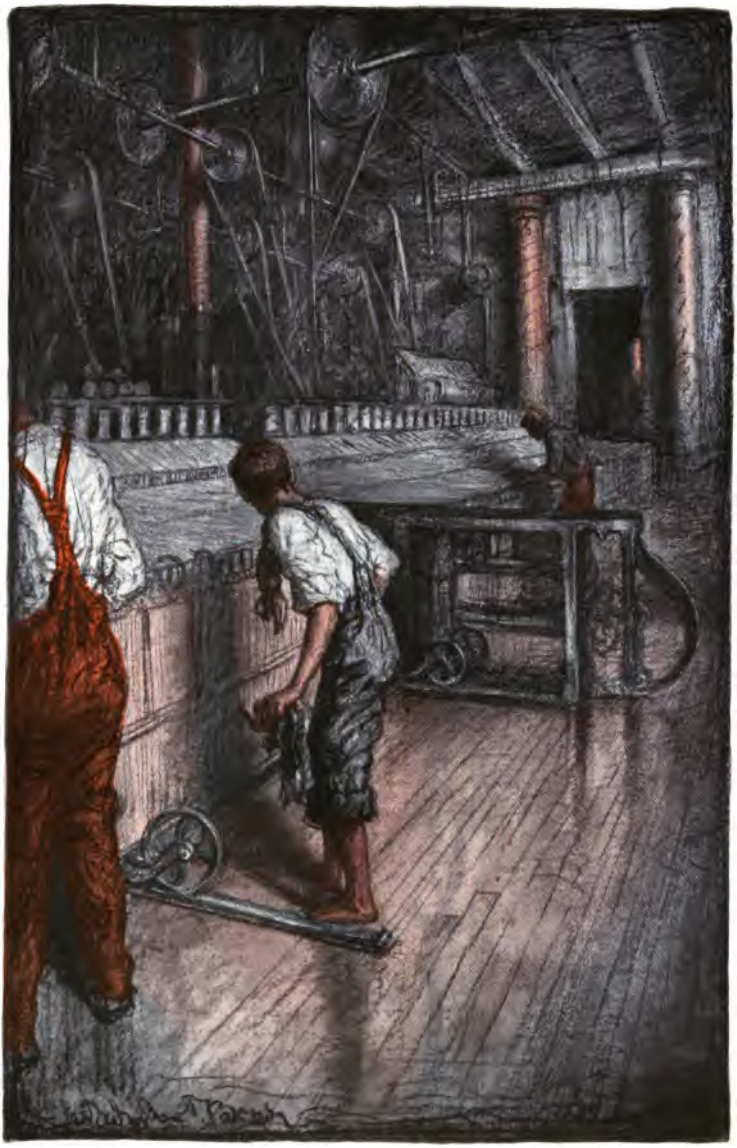
[illegible] myself to conditions as they [illegible] the rules without compunction. [illegible] fallers, which, like teeth, chopped [illegible] hand, unless great speed and pre- [illegible] were used. I stuck a hand-brush into [illegible] pulleys, and brushed the cotton [illegible] past the mules and the iron posts [illegible], just in time to avoid being crushed. [illegible] Skinner, a close friend of mine, had his

THE SPINNERS WOULD NOT STOP THEIR MULES WHILE I CLEANED THE WHEELS

room more than two days. The mule-spinners were on piece work, and their wages depended upon their keeping the mules in motion, consequently the back-boy was *expected*, by a sort of unwritten understanding, to do all the cleaning he could, either while the machines were in motion or during the hours when they were stopped, as during the noon-hour or before the mill started in the morning. If a back-boy asked for the mules to be stopped while he did the cleaning, he was laughed at, and told to go to a very hot place along with his "nerve." I should have been deemed incapable had I demanded that the machinery be stopped for me. The spinner would have merely said, "Wait till dinner time!"

Not choosing to work during the stopping hour, I should merely have been asked to quit work, for the spinner could have made it impossible for me to retain my position.

So I just adapted myself to conditions as they were, and broke the rules without compunction. I had to clean fallers, which, like teeth, chopped down on one's hand, unless great speed and precautions were used. I stuck a hand-brush into swift-turning pulleys, and brushed the cotton off; I dodged past the mules and the iron posts they met, just in time to avoid being crushed. Alfred Skinner, a close friend of mine, had his



THE SPINNERS WOULD NOT STOP THEIR MULES WHILE I CLEANED THE WHEELS

body pinned and crushed badly. I also tried to clean the small wheels which ran on tracks while they were in motion, and, in doing so, I had to crawl under the frame and follow the carriage as it went slowly forward, and dodge back rapidly as the carriage came back on the jump. In cleaning these wheels, the cotton waste would lump, and in the mad scramble not to have the wheels run over it to lift the carriage and do great damage to the threads, I would risk my life and fingers to extract the waste in time. One day the wheel nipped off the end of my little finger, though that was nothing at all in comparison to what occurred to some of my back-boy friends in other mills. Jimmy Hendricks to-day is a dwarfed cripple from such an accident. Hern Hanscom has two fingers missing, Earl Rogers had his back broken horribly. Yet the notices always were posted, the company was never liable, and the back-boy had no one but himself to blame; yet he could not be a back-boy without taking the risk, which shows how much humanity there can be in law.

Legally I worked ten and a half hours, though actually the hours were very much longer. The machinery I could not clean while in motion, and which the spinner would not stop for me during work-hours, I had to leave until noon or early morning. Then, too, the spinner I worked

for paid me to take over some of his work that could be done during the stopping hours, so that there was a premium on those valuable hours, and I got very little time out of doors or at rest. There were generally from three to four days in the week when I worked thirteen and thirteen hours and a half a day, in order to catch up with the amount of work that I had to do to retain my position.

In all, at this time I had five men over me who had the right to boss me. They were: two spinners, the overseer, second hand, and third hand. One of the spinners was a kindly man, very considerate of my strength and time, while the other was the most drunken and violent-tempered man in the room. He held his position only by virtue of having married the overseer's sister. He was a stunted, bow-legged man, always in need of a shave. He wagged a profane tongue on the slightest provocation, and tied to me the most abusive epithets indecency ever conjured with. He always came to work on Monday mornings with a severe headache, a sullen mood, and filled himself with Jamaica ginger, which, on account of its percentage of alcohol, served him the same palatable, stimulating, and satisfying functions of whisky without making him unfit to walk up and down his alley between his dangerous mules.

By having to be in the mill when the machinery was stopped, I was forced to listen to the spinners as they held their lewd, immoral, and degenerate conversation. It was rarely that a decent subject was touched upon; there seemed to be few men there willing to exclude profligacy from the rote. This was because "Fatty" Dunding, a rounded knot of fat, with a little twisted brain and a black mouth, was the autocrat of the circle, and, withal, a man who delighted to talk openly of his amours and his dirty deeds. As there were no women or girls in the room, significant words and suggestive allusions were shouted back and forth over the mules, whisperings, not too low for a skulking, fascinated boy, hidden behind a wastebox, to drink in, were in order during the noon hour. The brothel, the raid of a brothel, the selling of votes, and references to women, formed the burden of these conferences. Occasionally some spinner would "Hush" out loud, there would be a warning hand held up, but only occasionally.

God had not endowed me with any finer feelings than most of the lads I worked with, but outside the mill I put myself in closer touch with refining things than some of them: reading, occasional attendance on a Sunday school and a mission, and in me there was always a never-to-be-downed ambition to get an education. That

is why those conversations I was forced to hear were like mud streaks daubed with a calloused finger across a clear conscience. It was like hearkening to the licking of a pig in a sty after God in His purity has said sweet things. I felt every fine emotion toward womankind, and toward manhood, brutalized, impiously assaulted. I felt part of the guilt of it because I was linked in work with it all. That mule-room and its associations became repugnant. My spirit said, "I will not stand it." My will said, "You'll have to. What else can you do?"

That became the question which held the center of the state in my rebellion against the mill. "What else could I do?"

I wanted an education. I wanted to take my place among men who did more than run machines. I wanted to "make something of myself."

The arousement of this ambitious spirit in me was curiously linked with the reading of a great number of five-cent novels which had to do with the "Adventures" of Frank Merriwell. This young hero was a manly man, who lived an ideal moral life among a group of unprincipled, unpopular, and even villainous students at Yale College. Frank had that Midas touch by which every character he touched, no matter how sodden, immediately became changed to pure gold.

Frank himself was an intense success in everything he did or undertook. He preached temperance, purity of speech, decency, fairness, and honor. He had both feet on the topmost principle in the moral code. True, with romantic prodigality he did everything under any given conditions with epic success. If he went to a track-meet as a spectator, and the pole vaulter suddenly had a twisted tendon, Frank could pull off his coat, take the pole and at the first try, smash all existing records. A Shakesperian actor would be suddenly taken ill, and Frank would leap from a box, look up the stage manager, dress, and take the rôle so successfully that everybody would be amazed at his art. It was the same with all branches of sport, or study, of social adventure — he did everything in championship form. But back of it all were good habits, fair speech, heroic chivalry, and Christian manliness, and the reading of it did me good, aroused my romantic interest in college, made me eager to live as clean a life as Frank amidst such profligacy as I had to meet. That reading spoiled me ever after for the mill, even if there had been nothing else to spoil me. I, too, a poor mill lad, with little chance for getting money, with so sober a background as was against my life, wanted to make my mark in the world as the great figures in history had done. I immedi-

ately made a special study of the literature of ambition. I took the Success Magazine, read the first part of Beecher's biography, where he made a table-cloth of an old coat, and fought through adverse circumstances. I fellowshipped with Lincoln as he sprawled on the hearth and made charcoal figures on the shovel. I felt that there must be something beyond the mill for me. But the question always came, "What else can you do?"

And the question had great, tragic force, too. I had not strength enough to make a success in the mule-room. I had an impoverished supply of muscle. My companions could outlift me, outwork me, and the strenuous, unhealthy work was weakening me. The long hours without fresh air made me faint and dizzy. One of the back-boys, himself a sturdy fellow, in fun, poked my chest, and when I gave back with pain, he laughed, and sneered "Chicken-breasted!" That humiliated me, and I might have been found thereafter gasping in the vitiated air, enthused by the hope that I could increase my chest expansion a few inches; and I also took small weights and worked them up and down with the intention of thickening my muscles!

"What else can you do?" That haunted me. It would not be long before I should have to give in: to tell my overseer that I had not strength

enough to do the work. Yet, as if Fate had obsessed me with the idea, I could not bring myself to think that the world was open to exploration; that there were easier tasks. I was curiously under the power of the fatalistic, caste thought, that *once a mill boy, always a mill boy*. I could not conceive there was any other chance in another direction. That was part of the terror of the mill in those days.

So that dream, "to make something of myself," with a college appended, only made my days in the mill harder to bear. When the sun is warm, and you, yourself are shut in a chilly room, the feeling is intensified tragedy.

But day after day I had to face the thousands of bobbins I had in charge and keep them moving. Thousands of things turning, turning, turning, emptying, emptying, emptying, and requiring quick fingers to keep moving. A fight with a machine is the most cunning torture man can face — when the odds are in favor of the machine. There are no mistaken calculations, no chances with a machine except a break now and then of no great consequence. A machine never tires, is never hungry, has no heart to make it suffer. It never sleeps, and has no ears to listen to that appeal for "mercy," which is sent to it. A machine is like Fate. It is Fate, itself. On, on, on, on it

clicks, relentlessly, insistently, to the end, in the set time, in the set way! It neither goes one grain too fast or too slow. Once started, it must go on, and on, and on, to the end of the task. Such was the machine against which I wrestled — in vain. It was feeding Cerebus, with its insatiable appetite. The frames were ever hungry; there was always a task ahead, yes, a dozen tasks ahead, even after I had worked, exerted myself to the uttermost. I never had the consolation of knowing that I had done my work. *The machine always won.*

I did take a rest. I had to steal it, just as a slave would. I had to let the machine go on, and on, and on without me sometimes, while I took a rest and let the tasks multiply. That meant double effort after I got up, getting in the mill a little earlier on the morrow, a shorter time for dinner at noon. The tasks had to be done in the end, but I took some rest. I hid from the eyes of the overseer, the second hand, the third hand, and the spinners, behind waste boxes and posts, and had spare minutes with a book I had brought in and hidden under some cotton, or with dreaming about "making something of myself, some day." If I let myself dream beyond the minute, a vile oath would seek me out, and I would hear my Jamaica-ginger-drinking-spinner sneering, "You filthy——! Get that oiling done!"

Chapter XIII. How my Aunt and Uncle Entertained the Spinners

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MEANTIME there was poor consolation in my home. Aunt and uncle were drinking every night. Aunt, with the advantage over my uncle, was drinking much during the day.

When our dinners came, carried by a neighbor's boy, they were generally cold, cheerless combinations of canned tongue, store bread lavishly spread with butter, jelly roll, and a bottle of cold soda water, either strawberry or ginger flavor! We knew what that sort of dinner meant. Aunt Millie was drunk at home, too much intoxicated to make a warm dinner. We had to work through the afternoon, knowing that when we arrived home at night we should find her either at a saloon, in a back room at a neighbor's, or at home, helpless, incoherent.

"Oh, Al," sighed my uncle, "I don't see what

we're coming to. What's the use of you and me slaving here and she taking on so? Do you wonder, lad, that it's hard for me to keep a pledge? It just drives me mad. Here we have to go on through the day, working ourselves to death, only to have the money go in that way! It's torture, and always sets me off into drink, too!"

When we arrived home on such nights, uncle would have stored up an afternoon of wrath, and, on entering the house, would unload it on aunt. She would work herself into an hysterical paroxysm, screaming, shrieking, pawing, and frothing at the mouth, so that uncle would suddenly leave her to me and go off for the night to a saloon.

In the morning, when both were sober, would occur the real disheartening quarrel, when aunt would tell uncle he lied if he said she had been drunk; the words would get more and more heated until, in an unbearable fit of rage, insults would be exchanged and lead up to a struggle, a bloody struggle, that sometimes was on the threshold of murder.

That day there would be no dinner for us at all, and I would have to run out to the gates and buy something like an apple-roll or a pie. At night we would find aunt sitting down, perfectly sober, but silent, and with no supper ready.

"Get it yourself, you old fiend," she would

announce. Uncle would leave the house and get his meal in an eating-house, while aunt would make me a supper and scold me while I ate it, for she always considered me as one of her secret enemies, and linked my name with my uncle's in almost every quarrel.

But there were few quarrels of long standing between my foster-parents. They were generally patched up with a drink or two. Then the wheel would turn again and produce exactly the same conditions as before.

One day, uncle, in a noble-minded effort to get away from temptation, told us that he had decided to board in another place, where he could live in peace. But aunt visited all the boarding-houses that she knew, finally found her husband in one at the North End, and scolded him so unmercifully, and unloaded so much weight of family history, that he came back to the South End with her on the car, took a pail, and brought back a quart of beer, and things went on as before.

After we had established our piano, and when uncle had become well acquainted with the spinners, he proposed to invite some of them with their wives for a "house-warming."

The event occurred on a Saturday night. "Fatty" Dunding came, and brought an unknown woman with him, whom he tickled under

the chin in play quite often, and told her that she was a "stunner in that new piece of hair, even better looking than in t'other lighter shade!" Tom Fellows, a tall man with a poetic face, brought his wife and child, a baby of seven months. There was a bass-voiced spinner named Marvin present, and he brought a roll of music with him.

"What hast' got in, Stanny?" asked "Fatty." "Summat to warm cockles o' t' 'eart?"

Uncle told him that there was half a barrel of beer in the cellar: that there were several bottles of portwine in the pantry, and that there was a taste of whiskey and a few softer drinks on hand.

By eight o'clock the program began to shape itself. Marvin undid his roll, at the first request, placed before my uncle a copy of "White Wings," and asked, as the Hadfield bassoes had in the former days in the parlors of the "Linnet's Nest," and the "Blue Sign," "Can t' play it?"

And uncle responded, "Hum it o'er!" Marvin bent down his head as if in the act of telling a secret, hummed it over for a few bars, when uncle, after fingering with his chords, struck the pitch, and began to vamp gloriously.

"Wait till I play t' introduction," he said, and he hunched back, and confidently "introduced" the air to the satisfaction of all. Marvin sang "White Wings," and after he had dampened

his pipe with a noggin of whiskey, he asked uncle if he knew "I am a Friar of Orders Grey?"

Uncle said, again, "Hum it o'er." When the introduction had been given, Marvin began a tumbling performance on the low notes that won great applause.

"Tha' went so low, lad, that we couldna' 'ear thee, eh, folks?" grinned "Fatty."

"Hear, hear! Hen-core, hen-core!" shouted the audience, but Marvin said that he'd better rest. Singing low tickled his whistle unduly.

But uncle knew "Sally In Our Alley," which Tom Fellows sang with a lift of his light brows at the high notes, and a crinkling of his chin as he bent his head to get the low ones. Tom had almost a feminine voice; a romantic chord ran through all his singing, so that he was at his best in an original song of his, which he had written shortly before and was having the bandmaster set to four-part music for the piano. "Hum it," said uncle. And Tom went through the usual process until uncle had the key, the time, and the chords. Tom's song, which was later published at his own expense, began:

"Bright was the day,
Bells ringing gay,
When to church I brought my Sue.
I felt so proud
'Mongst all the crowd"—

and Uncle Stanwood considerably increased his reputation for improvisation when at the end of the verse, where Tom lingered lovingly on the sentiment to the extent of four full rests, he introduced a set of trills!

With this part of the program over, the company retired to the cellar, where there was a boarded floor, a man with a concertina, and a half-barrel of beer. There followed a square dance and some more singing, but the beer was the chief enjoyment.

It was not long before drink had inflamed the peculiarities of temper of our guests. "Fatty" let loose his oaths and his foul speech, while Uncle Stanwood nearly got into a fight with him over it, but was prevented by Tom Fellows falling against him, in a drunken lurch, thereby diverting the issue. My aunt's tongue had a sting to it, and she was in a corner telling Mrs. Fellows that she, Mrs. Fellows, was not married to Tom, or else she would have her marriage certificate framed in the house, or, at least, could show it in the photograph album! Marvin was roaring "Rule Britannia," with the energy and incoherency of a bull. I told "Fatty" that he had better go home or else I would send for the police, and when he aimed his fist at my head, I merely dodged and he fell with a crash to the floor and went off into a piggish snoring. Tom Fellows

took his drunken leave, forgetting his wife, who was just then calling my aunt a series of uncomplimentary names. In some sort of way, our guests left us in the early morning. Then I saw that aunt and uncle were safely to sleep where they chanced to have stumbled, turned out the lamps, locked the door, and went to bed.

The next morning the Sabbath sun lighted up a sickening memento of the house-warming. Glasses were scattered about with odorous dregs of liquor in them. Chairs were overturned, and there were big splotches on the tablecloth in the kitchen, where port wine had been spilled. There was a lamp still burning, which I had overlooked, and it was sending out a sickly, oily fume. The house was like a barroom, with bottles scattered about the kitchen, clothes that had been left, and my foster parents yet in a drunken sleep where I had left them!

When Monday morning came, uncle was unfit to go to work. He told Aunt Millie so, and she immediately scolded him and worked herself in so violent a rage that the matter ended by uncle picking up some of his clothes and saying, "This is the last you'll see of me, Dame! I'm going to some other place where I'll be away from it. Al, there, can keep you on his four dollars a week—if he wants! I'm done!"

"And how about the debts, you — coward!" cried aunt. "I'll send the police after you, mind!"

"Let debts go to the dogs," said my uncle. "You'll always manage to have the beer-wagon call!" And then he left the house.

He did not come to work that morning, and when the overseer asked me where he was, I said that uncle had left home and would not be back, so a spare man was put on uncle's mules.

That day, opened with such gloom, was one of thick shadows for me. The outlook was certainly disheartening. Why should I have to stand it all? It was my wages that were making some of this squalor possible. It was my money that helped purchase the beer. Then the old question obtruded itself: "What other thing can you do? You'll have to stay in the mill!"

I lost my heart then. I saw no way out from the mill, yet I knew that in the end, and that not long removed, the mill would overpower me and set me off on one side, a helpless, physical wreck. It was just a matter of a year or two, and that waiting line of out-of-works, which always came into the mule-room in the morning, would move up one, as the head boy was given my place.

Late in that afternoon, with the hands on the clock going slower than ever, and the bitterness of my life full before me, I began to think of suicide. I imagined that it would be the easiest and safest exit from it all. It would end the misery, the pain, the distraction, and the impending uselessness of my body for work! It was so easy, too. I took up a three-pound weight, and put it on a pile of bobbins high above my head. I balanced it on the edge where the merest touch would allow it to crash to the floor. Then I experimented with it, allowing it to fall to see how much force there was to it. I speculated as to whether it would kill me instantly or not. It was a great temptation. It just meant a touch of the finger, a closing of the eyes, a holding of the breath, and it would be over! I tried to imagine how sorry and repentant my aunt and uncle would feel. It might make them stop drinking. It was worth doing, then. But suddenly there loomed up the fact that there are two sides to a grave, and the thought of God, a judgment, and an eternity dazed me. I was afraid. I put the weight back, and thought: "Well, I guess I'll have to do the best I can, but it's hard!"

Chapter XIV. Bad Deeds in a Union for Good Works

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AFTER he had been away from home two weeks, uncle sent us a letter from a Rhode Island mill-town, informing us that he had the malaria, bad. Would one of us come and bring him home? There was a postscript which read: "Be sure and come for me either on a Monday, Wednesday, or a Friday. They are the alternate days when I don't have the shivers."

The day he came home he and aunt patched up peace over a pailful of beer, and there the matter ended, save that echoes of it would be heard at the next wrangle. Uncle took his place in one of the long lines of unemployed that wait for work at the end of the mill alleys. The expenses of the household were dependent upon the four dollars and a half I was earning at the time.

Then came the oppressive hot days of summer, with their drawn-out days with sun and cheerful

huckleberry fields in their glory, a summer day which I could not enjoy because I was shut out from it by the mill windows, and it was against the rules to look out of them. Some of the fellows left their work in the summer, and loafed like plutocrats, having the whole day and three meals to themselves. But if I had loafed I should have had neither money nor peace. My aunt would have made a loafing day so miserable for me that I should have been glad to be away from her scolding. Neither would she have fed me, and, all in all, I should have been the loser.

But the evenings were long and cool after the mill closed for the night. From half-past six to ten offered me many enticements, chief among which was the privilege of roaming the streets with the Point Roaders, a gang of mill boys, into which I was admitted after I had kicked the shins of "Yellow Belly," the leader. I was naturally drawn to make friends with Jakey McCarty, a merry fellow of deep designs, who would put a string around my neck while pretending to plan a walk somewhere, or have his finger in my pocket, poking for cigarette money, while talking about the peggy game he had last played.

In the winter we had a very lonesome time of it, as a gang. All we could do that was exciting included standing on a drug-store corner, where

we splashed the icy waters of a drinking trough in one another's faces, or attended, en masse, an indoor bicycle race at the "Rink," then in its glory. But we kept very close to the drinking trough, as money was not very plentiful.

I grew tired of mere loafing, and I finally persuaded Jakey McCarty, who liked reading, to go with me and visit the public library at least once a week, when we secured books, and while there also rooted among the back numbers of illustrated magazines and comic papers and made a night of it. But the gang resented this weekly excursion and separation, and various members reproached us with the stigma, "Libree-struck!" which, I always supposed, carried with it the same significance as "sun struck," *i.e.*, crazy over books.

In the following spring, though, the gang put up a parallel bar in an empty lot, and spent the early evenings in athletic diversions. When darkness came on, there were usually Wild West hold-ups, Indian dances, and cattle round-ups, in imitation of the features we read in the five-cent novels we bought and exchanged among ourselves. Then, with the putting on of long trousers, the gang became more active, and roamed at night over a broader area than before. Two of the gang even left us because they were "love-struck."

At the end of the following winter the catalogue of the various activities of the gang would read like a chapter from the Hunnish Invasion. There were Saturday night excursions up to the center of the city, which led us through Water street, through the Jewish and the Portuguese sections. As we passed by a grocery store, with tin advertising signs projecting from its doorway, we would line up, and each lad would leap in the air and snap his fist against the sign, producing a loud clatter and leaving it vibrating at great speed. Before the clerks had appeared on the scene we had passed on, and mixed with the Saturday night throng of shoppers. Our next stop was before a Jewish butcher shop, in front of which, on a projecting hook, hung a cow's heart and liver. Forming another line, the gang would leap again and catch that a resounding slap with the palm. Then one of the fellows poked his head in the shop door, and called, "Say, daddy, we'll give yer five cents if you'll let us take three more slaps!" On the next block, we came across a venerable Israelite, long-bearded and somnolent, watching for custom before his one-windowed clothing shop. Jakey leaped forward, gave a vigorous tug on the venerable's beard, and we broke into a run, with a shrieking, horrified group of Jews in mad pursuit.

Our objective in this series of adventures had

He Plucked the Venerable Beard of a Somnolent Hebrew

been the Union for Good Works, a benevolent institution, with splendid rooms, to which we went for our shower-bath; cost, five cents!

After we had taken our baths, and while we were busy with nine-pins, Jakey stood at an opposite end of the room, and plastered the frescoed walls of the Union for Good Works with the pasty contents of a silver package of cream cheese, to which he had helped himself at the stall of a large public market. That same night, when we arrived at the South End and were disbanding, Jakey set on view before our astonished eyes a five-pound pail of lard, a cap, and several plugs of tobacco, which he carried home and presented to his mother, saying that he had been to an auction!

Such are only a few of the adventures in which we indulged after a depressing day of it in the mill. One Fourth of July night we roamed over the city, through the aristocratic section, and in a wild, fanatical, mob-spirit, entirely without a thought as to the criminal lengths of our action, leaped over low fences, went through gates and ran on lawns, tramping down flower-beds, crushing down shrubs, and snatching out of their sockets the small American flags with which the houses were decorated.

The only religious declaration the gang made came in the winter, when, on dull Sunday after-

noons, merely for the walk it offered and the entertainments to which it gave us the entrée, we joined the classes in the Mission. I enjoyed sitting near the aristocratic, finely dressed young woman who instructed me as to the mighty strength of Samson, the musical and shepherding abilities of David, the martial significance of Joshua, and the sterling qualities of St. Paul. Most truly was my interest centered in the jeweled rings my teacher wore, or in the dainty scent that was wafted from her lace handkerchief when she gave one of those cute little feminine coughs! How far away, after all, was she from a knowledge of our lives and the conditions under which we lived! She aimed well, but whatever she intended, in her secret heart, went very, very wide of the mark. She had no moral thrills to treat us to, nor did she ever couch her appeal in so definite a way as to disturb our sins one bit. Perhaps she did not think we needed such strong medicine. Maybe she classed us as "Poor, suffering mill-boys!" and let that suffice. We needed someone to shake us by the shoulders, and tell us that we were cowards, afraid to make men of ourselves. We needed a strong, manly fellow, just then, to tell us, in plain speech, about the sins we were following. We needed, more truly than all else, a man's Man, a high, convincing Character, a

Spiritual Ideal, The Christ, pointed out to us. But this was not done, and we left the Mission with derision in our hearts for things we ought to have respected. Some of the fellows lighted their cigarettes with the Sunday-school papers they had been presented with.

Many of the Monday evenings in winter were gala nights, when we marched to the Armory and watched the militia drill. On our return home, we walked through the streets with soldierly precision, wheeling, halting, presenting arms, and making skilful formations when "Yellow Belly" ordered.

In September, the rules were posted in the mill that all minors who could not read and write must attend public evening school, unless prevented by physical incapacity. Four of us, "Yellow Belly," Jakey, Dutchy Hermann, and myself, had a consultation, and decided that we would take advantage of the evening school and improve our minds. But the remainder of the gang, with no other intention than to break up the school, went also, and though there was a special officer on guard, and a masculine principal walking on rubber soles through the halls and opening classroom doors unexpectedly, they had their fling.

An evening school in a mill city is a splendid commentary on ambition. There one finds

ambition at its best. After a day's work of ten and a half hours, tired, tired, tired with the long day of heat and burden-bearing, lungs choking for inhalations of fresh, cool air, faces flushed with the dry heat of the room, ears still dulled by the roar and clank of machines, brains numbed by hours and hours of routine — yet there they are, men grown, some of them with moustaches, growing lads of fifteen, and sixteen, girls and women, all of many nationalities, spending a couple of the precious hours of their freedom scratching on papers, counting, musing over dry stuff, all because they want to atone for past intellectual neglect. I was there because I wanted to push past fractions and elementary history, and go on towards the higher things. I was entirely willing to forego priceless hours for two nights a week to get more of a knowledge of the rudiments from which I had been taken by the mill.

I had a seat quite back in the room, because I had intimations that some of the gang were going to "cut up," and that a back seat would put me out of the danger zone of shooting peas, clay bullets, and other inventions. The man directly in front of me, with a first reader in his hand, was a tall Portuguese, the father of a family of children.

As soon as the starting gong had clanged

through the halls, the gang began its operations. Dutchy, in spite of his avowed intention of seriously entering the school, pretended that he could not recite the alphabet. "Bunny," a young Englishman, tried to pass himself off as a Swede and ignorant of English entirely. While the teachers were busy with the details of organization, the air was filled with riot, the special policeman was called in, and I along with the gang was threatened with arrest. Notwithstanding that such careful watch was maintained, the two weeks of night-school that I attended were filled with such disturbances that I grew discouraged and abandoned the project.

Whenever a circus or a fête, like the semi-centennial of the city, was advertised, the gang always planned to attend, in spite of the fact that the mills would not shut down. Six of us, in one room, by keeping away at noon, could cripple the mule-room so seriously that it could not run, and the spinners would get an afternoon off. Sometimes a group of spinners would hint to us to stay out that they might have a chance. That was my first experience in a form of labor-unionism.

Some of the men we worked under in the mill had a club-room, where they played table games, drank beer when the saloons were legally closed, and had Saturday night smokers, which my

uncle attended, and where he was generally called upon to "vamp" on the piano.

The gang used to haunt this club, and, when there was a concert on, would climb up and look in the windows. Finally we decided that we ought to have a club-room of our own. We sought out and rented a shanty which had served as a tiny shop, we pasted pictures of actresses, prize fighters, and bicycle champions around the walls, had a small card table covered with magazines and newspapers, and initiated ourselves into the "club."

The evenings of the first week we occupied, mainly, in sitting in front of the club, tilted back in chairs, and shouting to other mill lads, as they passed, in reply to their cynical salutations of "Gee, what style!" or, "Aw, blow off!" with a swaggering, "Ah, there, Jimmy. Come in and have a game!" Each member of the club kept from work a day, the better to taste the joys of club life to the full. About the fourth week, after we had held forth in a tempestuous whirl of boxing bouts, card matches, smoking bouts, and sensational novel-reading, the landlord repented of his bargain, locked us out, and declared to our remonstrance committee that he could no longer rent us the shanty, because we had become a "set of meddlin' ne'er-do-wells!"

So we went back to the drug-store corner,

with its drinking trough, where we could have been found huddled, miserable, like animals who have so much liberty and do not know how intelligently to use it. For we knew that after the night, came the morning, and with the morning another round in the mill, a fight with a machine, a ten hours' dwelling in heated, spiceless, unexciting monotony, and a thought like that made us want to linger as long as we dared on that drug-store corner.

Chapter XV. The College Graduate Scrubber Refreshes my Ambitions

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AT sixteen years of age, after three years in a mill-room, and with the unsocial atmosphere of my home to discourage me, I had grown to discount that old ambition of mine, to "make something of myself." My body had been beaten into a terrifying weakness and lassitude by the rigors of the mill. My esthetic sense of things had been rudely, violently assaulted by profanity, immorality, and vile indecencies. I had come to that fatalistic belief, which animates so many in the mill, that the social bars are set up, and are set up forever. I should always have to be in the mill. I should never get out of it!

Recurrently would pop up the old thought of self-destruction. There was some consolation in it too. I used to feel as if a great weight rested on my bent back: that it would weigh me

down, as Christian's sin had weighed him down, only mine was not the weight of sin, but the burden of social injustice. I seemed to be carrying the burden on a road that sloped upward, higher and higher, a road dark and haunted with chilly mists, growing darker, covering it. There was nothing but a climbing, a struggling ahead, nothing to walk into but gloom! What was the use of turning a finger to change it? I was branded from the first for the mill. You could turn back my scalp and find that my brain was a mill. You could turn back my brain, and find that my thoughts were a mill. I could never get out — away from the far-reaching touch of it. The pleasantest thing I enjoyed — an excursion to Cuttyhunk on a steamer, or a holiday at the ball game — had to be backgrounded against the mill. After everything, excursion, holiday, Sunday rest, a night of freedom on the street, an *enjoyable illness* of a day, a half day's shut-down — the *Mill!* The *Mill!*

What difference did it make that I took question-and-answer grammar to the mill, and hid myself every now and then, to get it in my mind, or hurried my dinner that I might read it? After all, the mill, the toil, and the weakness. What difference did it make if I read good books, on my uncle's recommendation?

After I had gone through romance, there was the muddy prose of my life in the mill and at home!

Just then Fate, who served me so ungenerously as I thought, worked one more mortal into her wheel, brought one more from dreams and high purposes into the ring with me. He was a stout, pudgy-faced, lazy man of thirty, who came in to mop the floor, oil some of the pulleys, and keep some of the spare alleys cleaned.

But he was a college graduate! He was the first college graduate I had ever had the honor to work near. The overseers, our superintendent, were not graduates of a college. I was thrilled! That man, working at the end of my alley, scrubbing suds into the floor with a soggy broom, mopping them dry, pushing his pail of hot water before him, carrying a shaft pole or mopping along with a pail of grease in his hands — that man was a *COLLEGE GRADUATE!* All the dreams that I had indulged relative to classic halls, ivy-covered walls, the college fence, a dormitory, foot-ball field — all those dreams centered around that lumpish head, for the Scrubber had been to college! He represented to me the unattainable, the Mount Olympus top of ambitious effort. Suds, pail, soggy mop, grease pail, and lazy fat were transformed before me, for *HE HAD BEEN TO COLLEGE!*

What college had he graduated from? I do not know to this day. How had he stood in college? Another shrug of the shoulders must suffice. *WHY* was *HE* in *THE MILL?* I never paused in my hero adoration to ask that. Sufficient for me that he had been to college!

One day I made so bold as to address this personage. I went up shyly to him, one day, and said, "Could I make something of myself if I went to college?" He leaned on his mop, his light brows lifted, his cheeks puffed out like as if a frog were blowing itself up, then he said in a thick, dawdling voice, "You could either come out a thick head or a genius. It depends!" Then I made my great confession, "I'd like to go to college — if I only had the brains — and the money," I confided. Then he seemed to be trying to swallow his tongue, while he thought of something germane to the conversation in hand.

Then he replied, "It does take brains to get through college!" and then turned to his work. I was not to be put off. I touched his overall brace, and asked, "Do you think that I might beg my way into college some day? Of course I wouldn't be able to graduate with a title, like a regular student, but do you think they'd let me study there and try to make something of myself, sir?" The deference in my address must have brought him to attention with a little

beyond his habitual speed, for he turned to me suddenly, and said, "Of course they will, you crazy kid!"

I left him then, left him with a new outlook into the future, for had I not been told by a REAL college graduate that I could get to college! Every former dream hitherto chained down broke loose at that, and I felt myself with a set of made-over ambitions. The seal, the signature, had been placed on officially. I could do it if I tried. I could get out of the mill; away from it. I could get an education that would give me a place outside it!

After that I began to fit myself for college! It was a fitting, though, of a poor sort. I did not know how to go about it. There seemed to be none in my circle overeager to tell me how to go about the matter. It was blind leading all the way.

I thought, first of all, that if I could get hold of some books of my own, my very own, that would be the first step toward an intellectual career. I had read the lives of several scholars, and their libraries were always mentioned. I thereupon resolved that I would own some books of my own.

The next stage in an intellectual career, was the reading of *DRY* books. I resolved that the books I purchased should be dry, likewise.

So after that I found real diversion in visiting the Salvation Army salvage rooms, where they had old books for which they asked five and ten cents apiece. The rooms were so laden with old clothes and all sorts of salvage that I had to root long and deep often to bring the books to light. I also went among the many second-hand shops and made the same sort of eager search.

After a few months of adventuring I had my own library of dry books. Their dryness will be evident from the check-list which follows.

I was especially delighted with my discovery, among a lot of old trousers in a second-hand shop, of a board-cover copy of "Watts on the Mind." Its fine print, copious foot-notes, its mysterious references, as "Seq.," "i.e.," "Aris. Book IV., ff.," put the stamp upon it as being a very scholarly book indeed. I looked it through, and not finding any conversation in it, judged that it was not too light. Its analytical chapter headings, and its birthmark, "182 —," fully persuaded me that I might get educated from that sort of a book!

In the salvage rooms, where I obtained most of my treasures, I obtained a black, cloth-bound book, with mottled damp pages and with a mouldy flavor to it, entitled, "Scriptural Doctrine," which I knew was a dry book, because it

was a religious book printed in the 40's. It undertook to summarize all the great and fearsome doctrines from the Fall to the Recovery by massing every appropriate passage of scripture under them, and concluding, with loyalty to the major premises, with stout assertions that they were all true because they were. I also found, in the same place and on the same day, a well-worn, pencil-marked, dog-eared copy of "A History of the Ancient World," filled with quaint wood-cuts of ruined walls, soldiers in battle, with steel spears and bare feet. It was covered with a crumpled piece of paper bag, and there were only two leaves missing two thirds of the way in the book, cutting the history of the Greeks right in two. I knew that that would be a scholar's book on the face of it. Scholars always read about old nations and destroyed cities, and that book was filled with such records. I was pleased with it. I also picked up, in the salvage rooms, a three-volume edition of "The Cottage Bible," two volumes of which were without covers, and one of them had most of the leaves stained as if it had been in a fire somewhere. It was an edition printed somewhere near the beginning of the nineteenth century. I bought that, first, because it was a three-volume edition on one subject; it was ponderous. Scholars always had such books. I also bought

it because it had so many notes in it. Half of each page was covered with them in fine print. To me, that was the highest type of intellectual book.

I later added to the collection — a thrilling find — a well-bound copy of a civil trial, in Boston, with every word stenographically recorded, and interesting to me because Paul Revere was one of the witnesses, the ORIGINAL Paul Revere that you read of in the school books and see advertised on coffee and cigars! I wondered how such a valuable work had ever passed the book collectors who paid thousands for such prizes! I bought it in much trembling, lest the second-hand shopkeeper should be aware of the book's real value and not let me have it for ten cents! Perhaps there might be an old document hidden in its yellow leaves! It was with such high, romantic feelings that I made the purchase, and hurried from the shop as swiftly as I could.

The book-buying, once established, kept with me persistently, and crowded out for a time the more material pleasures of pork pies, cream puffs, and hot beef teas. I turned nearly all my spending money into books. One Saturday afternoon, for the first time, I went into a large city bookstore where they always had at the door a barrel of whale-ship wood for fireplaces.

I scouted through the shop for bargains, and besides sundry purchases of penny reproductions of famous paintings, I secured Sarah K. Bolton's "Poor Boys who became Famous," marked down to fifty cents.

My next purchases at the bookstore were a manilla-covered copy of Guizot's "History of France," "Life of Calvin," a fifty-cent copy of the Koran which I purchased because it was an oriental book like the "Arabian Nights," and on account of the thrilling legends and superstitions with which Sale has filled a copious Addenda. I also bought a fifteen-cent copy of Spurgeon's "Plow Talks," and a ten-cent pamphlet of "Anecdotes for Ministers," because I reasoned that ministers always had good stories in their sermons—*ergo*, why not get a source-book for myself, and be equal with the ministers?

Week by week my stock of books grew, each volume probably wondering why it ever became mixed in such strange company. I bought no fiction, now. That was left behind with dime novels and "Boy's Books!" I was aiming for *REAL* scholarship now, and I might fit myself for college. I had a great longing now to align my tastes with those that I imagined would be the tastes of real scholars. From "Poor Boys who became Famous" I learned that some of the heroes therein depicted had the habit of

reading any massive work they laid their fingers on, of borrowing *GOOD* books, almost without regard to the subject. Good reading seemed to be the standard, and to that standard I tried to conform. I went into the shop of an Englishman who sold things at auction, and, among his shelves, I found a calfskin-bound "Cruden's Concordance of the Bible," which, I found on examination, contained the "Memoirs" of the author. That must be good reading, I judged. Any man who could compile such a mass of references must be dry enough to be a scholar. So I paid twenty-five cents for the book immediately. The same evening I also secured two volumes of Hume's "History of England," printed, so the Roman numerals told me, after I had laboriously sought out their meaning, before the end of the eighteenth century, and with the long "s" and very peculiar type. One of the volumes had a cover missing. Though the history did not begin until the later kings, I had the satisfaction of knowing that at least I had a Good history on my list.

Of a technical and necessary nature, I had two well-worn, and very old, arithmetics which I bought for two cents, and Binney's "Compend of Theology," which gave a simple and dogmatic summary of Protestant doctrine from the standpoint of Methodism. To complete my scholarly

equipment, I knew that I ought to keep a journal of my doings, as every biography that I read mentioned one. So I bought a small pocket diary for that year. My library was complete.

In my reading of biography, I noted that a scholar or a student had his books in cases and that he had a study. I resolved to display my books in a study, likewise. The only available place in the house was a large front room, which my aunt kept closed because there was no furniture for it. The floors were carpetless and lined with tacks left by the last occupant in tearing up the carpet. The wall-paper was dim with dust, and the windows had the shutters drawn because there were no curtains for them. During the day the light filtered dismally through the blinds.

I asked my aunt if I might use that to study in, and she said that "it wasn't any fret of hers." I could. So I placed a bedroom chair, and secured a small, second-hand writing-desk, and placed them in the room. I used the white mantel-shelf for my books. I placed them lovingly on end, and according to color, and they seemed magnificent to me — my first library! I would stand before them, in proud contemplation, and whisper to myself, "My own books!"

I have read that in the midst of the rough ocean there are quiet, calm places where a storm-

driven ship may ride at peaceful anchor. That dingy room, with its pathetic row of dingy, obsolete books, its bedroom chair and small desk, with the accumulated dust on the bare floor, was such a place for me.

My first duty after supper was to insert a comment in my diary. Many times I would leave the table with aunt and uncle in violent controversy, with one or another of them intoxicated and helpless, and the line would be, in significant red ink, "Dark To-day!" It was "Dark To-day," and "Dark To-day" for weeks and months. There were few occasions to ever write, "Had a good day, to-day" which, being interpreted, always meant, "Aunt and uncle are not drinking now and are living together without rows!" For I always condensed my diary record, for I thought, "It might be read—some day. Who knows? You'd better not be too definite!"

I ceased to go out at night now, for I was determined "to make something of myself," now that I had read "Poor Boys who became Famous." What they had done, I might do. They had gone through hardships. I could go through mine, if only I was not so weak in body.

One night my aunt severely arraigned me for something I had not said. She heaped her significant phrases on my head, taunted me, and

aroused in me the murderer's passion. I immediately ran to my "study," closed the door, and received consolation from "Poor Boys who became Famous" by finding that they had attained fame through patience. I resolved to bear with fortitude the things that were set in my way.

It was a very elaborate, systematic, and commendable system of self-improvement that I laid out for myself, chiefly at the suggestion of a writer in "Success Magazine," which I was reading with avidity. "A few minutes a day, on a street-car, at a spare moment, indulged in some good book, have been sufficient to broadly train many men who otherwise would *NEVER* have reached the pinnacle of fame," it read, and, acting on that hint, I resolved to get at least a few minutes a day with my own great books. I would not be narrow, but would read in them all every evening! I would read law, theology, history, biography, and study grammar and arithmetic!

So my procedure would be this: After my entry in the diary, I would read a page from "The Life of Calvin," then one of the romantic legends from the appendix to the Koran, always, of course, after I had dutifully read one of the chapters on "The Ant," "Al Hejr," "Thunder," "The Troops," "The Genii" or an equally exciting title like the "Cleaving Asunder," the con-

text of which, however, was generally very dull and undramatic. After the Koran I would pass to "The History of The Ancient World" and try to memorize a list of the islands of the Grecian group before the power of Hellas waned. By this time, though, I was usually unfit to proceed, save as I went into the kitchen and sprinkled water on my burning forehead; dizzy spells and weakness of the eyes would seize hold of me, and I would have to pause in utter dejection and think how grand it must be to be in college where one did not have to work ten and a half hours in a vitiated atmosphere, doing hard labor, before one sat down to study. Sometimes I would say: "No wonder college people get ahead so well—they have the chance. What's the use of trying?" And at that dangerous moment of doubt, "Poor Boys who became Famous" would loom so large that I would renew my ambitions, and sit down once more to finish my study.

The grammar and the arithmetic I studied in the mill during any minute that I could snatch from my work. I needed help on those subjects, and I could ask questions of the College Graduate Scrubber. Sometimes I would vary the order, and read the theological definitions from "Cruden's Concordance," or the scriptural proofs of great doctrines in "The Biblical Theology,"

with a page or two from the law trial in which "Paul Revere" had a part.

Whenever I managed to get in a good night of study without suffering in doing it, I would try to astonish the College Graduate Scrubber with a parade of what I had memorized. I would get him at a moment when he was especially indulgent with his time and say:

"Did you ever read in the Koran about that legend of Abraham, when he saw the stars for the first time and thought about there being one God?" And the Scrubber would look at me in astonishment and confess, "I never read that book. What is it?" "Why, didn't you have it to read in college?" I would ask in amaze. "It's the Turk's Bible, and has the word "God" in it the most times you ever saw!"

"They don't read that in college," he would answer. One day, when I was asking him to name over the islands of Greece, with their ancient names — to memorize which I had been working for some time — he lifted up his mop, made a dab at my bare legs, and stormed, "Sonny, you're too fresh. Get away from here." Seeing that he did not seem especially sympathetic towards my ambitious effort to be "learned," I let him alone, consoling myself with the thought, "Well, how can you expect a college graduate to bother with you? Mind your

own affairs, and some day you might get to college."

The gang noticed my defection that winter and asked me what was wrong.

"I'm trying to educate myself," I said. "Yellow-Belly" sniffed, and called contemptuously: "Say, fellows! he's got the book-bats, Priddy has."

"Well," I contended, "you fellows can hang around this drug-store corner from now till doomsday, if you want. I want to learn enough to get out of the mill. Besides, it's none of your business what I do, anyway!" and with that fling I had to run off to escape the stones that were hurled at me.

Chapter XVI. How the Superintendent Shut Us out from Eden

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THE numerous quarrels in which my foster parents indulged, and during which my aunt was not averse to proclaiming loudly from the open windows insulting comments on her neighbors, finally brought a lawyer's letter to the house in which we were living, summarily ordering us to remove ourselves from the neighborhood. Aunt flew into a passion when the letter was read, and had all manner of sharp criticism for "neighbors who don't tend to their own faults." Uncle bowed his head for shame, while I went to my study, shut the door, and prayed through tears that God would, in some way, give me a good home like many another boy, and that He might make aunt and uncle more respectable.

Under the shock of this notice my uncle gave up his work, and said that he was determined to make a new start in some other place.

"I'm going to see, Millie," he said, "if I can't

get somewhere to work, in God's world, where there aren't saloons to tempt us. I'll send for you as soon as I find a place like that."

Word soon came from him telling me to give up my work; that he had secured a place in a Connecticut cotton-mill. His letter also stated that we should live in a quiet little village where there were no saloons permitted by the corporation, and that our home would be in a little brick cottage with a flower bed and lawn inside the front gate!

"What a god-send this will prove," said Aunt Millie, "to get away from the saloons. Maybe Stanwood 'll keep sober now. Let us hope so!"

So at seventeen years of age I went with my aunt and uncle to the village, a strange, quiet place after the rumble and confusion of the city. It was well into spring when we arrived, and we found the village beautiful with restful green grass and the fruit-tree blossoms.

As soon as we arrived my uncle took us to the corporation boarding-house, a dismal brick structure, like a mill, with a yellow verandah on its face. "We'll have to put up here till the furniture comes," announced uncle.

The next morning I took my overalls with me and began work in the mule-room. It was a pleasant place when contrasted with the places I had worked in in the city. The overseer did

not urge us on so strenuously. There was not that terrible line of unemployed in the alley every morning, waiting to take our places.

I was given a place with my uncle, and, when I had my work in hand, that first day, he would call me into the mule alley and chat with me about our new prospects.

"We'll begin all over, Al, and see if we can't do better by you. Maybe we'll be able to send you to school, if we can get some money laid by. This is our chance. We're away from drink. The corporation owns the village and won't allow a saloon in it. Now I can straighten up and be a man at last, something I've shamefully missed being the last few years, lad!"

Those first few days of our life in the village, uncle's face seemed to lose some of its former sad tenseness.

"Wait till the furniture gets here, lad," he said, repeatedly. "Then we'll settle down to be somebody, as we used to be."

Then the day that a postal came from the freight office saying that the furniture had arrived, the superintendent of the mill called my uncle away from his mules for a long consultation. Then he came back in company with my uncle, and mentioned to me that he would like to see and speak with me in the elevator room. I had only time to note that uncle's face was that

of a man who has just seen a tragedy. It was bloodless, and aged, as if he had lost hope.

What could all this mean? A mill superintendent did not usually consult with his hands except on very grave matters.

I found the superintendent waiting for me, with a very sober face. We had strict privacy. When he had shut the door, he said: "Al Priddy, I want to ask you what will seem, at first, a very impertinent and delicate question. You must give me a frank answer, even though it is very hard."

"Yes, sir," I said, wondering what it was to be.

"Al," he said, sternly, like a judge, "is your aunt a regular drinker — of intoxicants?"

So that was the question! I gasped, choked, and with my eyes on the floor, confessed, "She is, sir."

"Well," said the superintendent, "I am very sorry for you, my boy! I am sorry that you have to suffer because of other people. We cannot allow women who drink to live in our houses. We will not allow it if we know about it."

"But my aunt won't drink here," I said. "She said so, and there aren't any saloons, sir. That is the reason we came out this way!"

"Your aunt has been seen drunk in the village already!" announced the superintendent. "What do you think about that?"

The bottom went out of the fairy world we had hoped to live in, with that news. I could only stand there, dazed, shocked, wild with the sense of our loss.

"You cannot have the house I promised," said the superintendent. "I have told your uncle that. The furniture is not unloaded yet, and it must return. We will cover the expenses. We cannot permit the other women to suffer because of your aunt. She obtained liquor in some way and I shall look into it. You must go back. You cannot have any of our rents."

"But, sir," I pleaded, "won't you give us a chance. My uncle wants to do well, and we will try and see that my aunt keeps straight too. When we get settled, she'll change. It's our only chance. If we go back to the city it will be as bad as before, and that was bad enough. Give us one more chance!"

"But your aunt has managed to get drunk already, after having been in town only a few days. What will it be later?"

"Oh, sir," I went on, desperate at the chance that was slipping from us, "you are a member of the church and believe in forgiving as Christ did. Won't you give us a chance to straighten out? It might take time, but it means so much to aunt and uncle and — and me!"

"I shall have to refuse," said the superin-

tendent finally. "I have to think of the welfare of more families than one. Go back to your work now, and talk things over with your uncle. I will see him again."

I went back to my uncle and found him doing his work in a dreamy, discouraged way. The miserable hours of the morning wore on, and by noon there was no change in the unfortunate and gloomy situation in which we found ourselves.

When we had had dinner at the boarding house, uncle went to his room and informed Aunt Millie of what had transpired. Then he upbraided her, scolded her, and called her all manner of brutal names, because he was crazed with shame. My aunt did not cry out, but merely hurried from the room and did not return while we were there.

In the afternoon the superintendent came and had a conference with uncle, the upshot of which was, that uncle persuaded him to allow us to retain our work if we could find a house to rent that was not owned by the corporation. The overseer, consulted, said that there was a tenement of three rooms on the outskirts of the village which we might get, and with this prospect, uncle and I found the tragedy of our situation decreasing.

"We'll go right after supper and look up that

place," agreed Uncle Stanwood. "We might be lucky enough to get it, Al."

We did not find Aunt Millie at the boarding house when we arrived, so we ate our meal together, wondering where she could be and fretting about her. But after supper we took an electric car that went past the tenement we were thinking of examining. The car was crowded with mill-workers going to the city for the evening. Uncle and I had to stand on the rear platform.

The village had been left, and the car was humming along a level stretch of state highway bordered with cheerful fields, when our ears were startled by screams, and when uncle and I looked, as did the other passengers, we beheld a woman wildly fleeing through the field toward the river. She was screaming and waving her hands wildly in the air.

"My God!" shouted uncle, "it's Millie!" He shouted to the conductor, "Stop, quick, I'll look after her!" and when the car slowed down we both leaped to earth and ran, a race of death, after the crazed woman.

We caught her almost near the brink of the river, and found it difficult to keep her from running forward to hurl herself in it. She was bent on suicide. But finally we calmed her, and found that she had been drinking whisky, which

always so affected her, that the prospect of having to return to the city, the thought of having shamed us, had made her determine on suicide.

She did up her hair, straightened her clothes, and we three went further down the road, as far as the house we were seeking, examined the three rooms, and were fortunate enough to rent them. I came away with a light heart, for we would not have to leave the village after all.

Chapter XVII. I Founded the Priddy Historical Club

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ONE of the important items we had overlooked in securing the tenement at the border of the village was a saloon which stood next door to it! A saloon, too, that was the common resort of the village, because it stood outside the town lines! "Never mind, lad," said my uncle, "we'll struggle on in spite of it, you see. If only your aunt didn't have it under her nose all day! It'll be hard for her!" But there it was and matters could not be changed.

The first few weeks passed and found my aunt and uncle solidly entrenched behind strong temperance resolutions.

With this in mind, I began to enjoy my new situation. I made the acquaintance of a cloth designer, a young Englishman who loved books and talked familiarly and intelligently about ambition. He stimulated me to "make something of myself," when I unfolded my ambition toward that goal. We had long walks at night

and on Sundays, and I learned for the first time the joys of sympathetic friendship.

I became a regular attendant at the village church. Indeed, my whole life seemed washed of its grimy contact among the peace and simplicity of village life. To go from week to week and not see cheapness and vulgarity in the profusion I had been face to face with in the city, was dream-like and delightful. Now I seemed to be on the way toward the finer things of life.

I responded to my opportunity in a very definite and practical way. I founded *an historical society!* In my reading, I had picked up during a holiday in the city a history of the region, a history whose background was the romantic one of Indian lore and fascinating to me. I spoke enthusiastically to the cloth designer about it; he and I secured the interest of three or four other youths, and we resolved thereupon to establish an historical society, with regular, stated meetings, and lectures, real lectures!

The work in the mill with such a definite thing in mind as an historical society became less and less irksome. For the first time, I could master my duties and enjoy pleasant surroundings. I found humane conditions for the first time, and was better in mind and body because of them. In the mill we talked over the society,

and resolved, finally, to call it the Priddy Historical Club. It was formally voted, too, that I should go into the city, seek out the author of the ponderous history we had read, and ask him if he would not come out and lecture to us and start the club.

To see a real, live author and talk to him! What a task for me! How I was growing in the finer things. If only the College Graduate Scrubber could know that! It was a vast task, loaded with honor, and truly symbolical of my new intellectual attainments. So I dressed myself in my best clothes, put on a celluloid collar, and went into the city.

The author was a grey-bearded man, who was also librarian of the city library. I found him in his private office, where he listened graciously to the plans of the Priddy Historical Club. He consented to come out and address us, and also said that he would typewrite a course of historical research for our use!

The author met us, one evening, in a room of the church. He told us fascinating tales of early settlers, and left in our possession typewritten sheets filled with a well-planned and complete course of study. That was the first and only meeting of the club. The fellows lost interest at the formidableness of the program, the cloth designer had too much work to bother

reading on so large a scale, and I — I had other things of great moment to bother about.

In the middle of summer, a farmer across the way asked me to work for him, and though the wages were much smaller than I earned in the mill, and my aunt at first was loath to have me accept, I began work on the farm. My uncle was greatly pleased with this arrangement.

"Thank God, you have a chance to get some color in your cheeks," he said, and aunt laughed. "It would be a good sight to have him put a few pounds of flesh on his bones, wouldn't it?"

At last I was out of the mill, out in the fresh air all day! I stretched my arms, ran, leaped, and worked with great delight. I felt better, stronger, more inspired than ever to get ahead. But when I went home, after the day's work, I was so sleepy through exposure that I could no longer study. "Never mind," I thought; "if I only get a strong body out of it, it will be all right."

So I milked cows, delivered milk to a village three miles distant, and worked about the place, all with hearty good will. Every day I would look in a glass to see if my cheeks were puffing out or getting ruddy.

On Sunday I attended the village church and worshiped near the superintendent of the mill. I shared the farmer's pew, and though the beat of air and sun on my eyes made me very sleepy

when in a room, and though the minister must have wondered why I winked so laboriously during the service, as I tried to keep awake, I always brought to mind the pleasant places into which I had been led, and joined with the minister in a sincere prayer to the God who was leading me.

But one night I went home, and, as I neared the house, I heard hysterical screams and ran as fast as I could, knowing full well what I should see. My aunt was squirming on the floor, her hair undone, and her hat entangled in it. She had on her best dress. Her face was convulsive with hate, with intense insanity. She was shrieking: "Oh, he's killing me, killing me! Help! Murder!" I ran to her, caught the sickening odor of whisky from her lips and on examination found that there was a gash on her cheek. Then I stood up and looked around. Uncle, breathing heavily, sat at the other end of the table, before an untasted supper. His face was very stern and troubled.

"What have you done?" I shouted. "You've been hitting her, you coward!"

"I had to — to protect myself," he muttered. Then he showed me his face. The blood was dropping down when he took his handkerchief from it, and there was a gash in his temple.

"She threw a saucer square at me," he ex-

plained, in a low voice. "She had a table knife, and she's stronger than I am, so I just had to smash her with that," and he pointed to a stick of wood. "It saved her from murder, Al. I'm going away. It will maybe bring her round. If I stayed, she'd raise all sorts of rows and maybe get me to drinking again. She's been out to that rum shop. I found her, when I got home, dressed as she is, trying to warm a can of soup in the frying-pan. She tried to say she hadn't been drinking, and then we had the row, lad. Get her to bed, if you can. Get her out of the way, because when she sees me she's sure to begin it all over. I can't stop here, can I?"

"No, get away," I said; "we've had rows enough. Send us some money when you get work, and it'll be all right. Come and see us, if you get a good place. We might move away from here."

He packed his bundle, and went to the city on the next trolley-car, and left me alone to fight the matter through. I was earning four and a half dollars a week, and knew that we would have to fight hard if uncle did not send us any money. After I had placed my aunt in bed and left her to manage as best she could, knowing that her sobs would die down and a deep sleep ensue, I went out on the front step and sat down to think matters over.

"Now everybody in the village, the designer, and all your fine friends will know that your aunt drinks," I thought. "What's the use trying to be somebody and have these miserable things in the way!" How were we to get through the winter? It seemed inevitable that I should have to go back to the mill. The mill was bound to get me, in the long run. It was only playing with me in letting me out in the sun, the fresh air, and the fields for a while. The mill owned me. I would have to go back!

We tried to live through the winter, without getting word from my uncle, on the money I earned. Occasionally aunt would take some liquor, but she seemed to realize at last that she must not indulge overmuch. One day, growing desperate, I said to her, "If I catch you drinking on my money, now, I'll leave home, you see! I'll earn money to buy food, but I won't earn it for no saloon-keeper, mark my words!" I was only then beginning to see the light in which my own, personal rights to freedom stood. My aunt scolded me for awhile at such unheard of rebellion and such masterly impudence, but she took notice of my earnestness and knew that I would keep my word.

Finally the struggle became too much for us. We saw that we could not starve longer on the little wage I was earning, so we made plans to

return to the city where the mills were plenty and where I might earn more money. My aunt was only too eager to get away from a place where it was impossible to hide one's actions.

A card came from my uncle announcing that he had returned to New Bedford already, and asking us to come and join him.

"Yes," smiled my aunt, "I'll bet he's thinking of his stomach. He finds, when he's away, that it isn't every lodging-house keeper that can cook potato pies and things as tasty as his own wife. That's what he's homesick for, I'll bet. Write him that we'll be on hand. He means all right, but I'll guarantee he's half starved."

I eagerly accepted the privilege of running ahead to New Bedford to rent a tenement. I said to myself, "Yes, and I'll get one so far away from saloons that the temptation will not be under their noses, anyway!"

That was almost an impossible thing. The rents were excessively high in such paradises. I had to compromise by renting a downstairs house on what seemed to be a respectable street. The nearest saloon was five blocks away.

Chapter XVIII. A Venture into Art

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ONCE more we took up life in New Bedford, with the thunder of many mills in our ears, and the short year's sojourn in the Connecticut village so dim a memory that it was almost out of mind immediately under the press of sterner, more disquieting things.

All the foulness of life seemed to be raked up at my feet since I had been in finer, sweeter air. I went back for a few nights to the Point Road Gang. It was composed of the same fellows save that a few of them had gone away from home, one to prison for larceny, another to an insane asylum through excessive cigarette indulgence, and those who were left had obtained some very wise notions from life.

Jakey was one of those who had gone away from home. One night he joined his old comrades. "Now, fellows, he said, with somewhat of a swagger, "what's the matter with being sports, eh?" "We are sporty," announced Bunny.

"Ah, git off the earth, you!" derided Jakey. "Where's the booze?"

"Uh, we ain't skeered of that!" retorted Bunny, "are we, fellows?"

To show that they were not afraid of a drink, some of the gang fished up some pennies from their pockets and made a pot of fifteen cents.

"Get a can, somebody," announced Jakey. "I'll get the growler for you, with foam on it too."

A large pail was procured, and Jakey carried it into one of the saloons. We waited for his return, a huddled group standing in a vacant lot where we should not be seen. This was to be the gang's first official venture into inebriety. When Jakey returned with the can, it was passed around. We stood in a circle, the better to watch one another. There were ten in the circle. Only three of us did not take a drink, for which we were not only duly laughed at, but Jakey heaped all manner of filthy abuse on our heads. But we did not drink.

The gang, under the worldly-wise Jakey's direction, began, also, to hold "surprise parties" for the girls in the mill. These parties were arranged for Saturday nights. They were extremely shady functions, being mainly an excuse for beer-drinking, kitchen dancing, and general wild sport. The whole affair was based

THE GANG BEGAN TO HOLD "SURPRISE-PARTIES" FOR THE GIRLS IN THE MILL

on a birthday, a wedding, an engagement, or a christening. About twenty-five picked couples were usually invited.

After the presentation speech, dancing took place on the boards of the cellar. Then refreshments were passed, and the boys and girls freely indulged. By midnight the party usually attained the proportions of a revel, threaded with obscenity, vulgarity, fights, and wild singing.

The gang had drawn away from the things I cared for. I had now to live my own life, get my own amusements, and make new companionships.

I was working in the mule-room again and this time I was advanced to the post of "doffer." I had to strip the spindles of the cops of yarn and put new tubes on them for another set of cops. But this work involved the carrying of boxes of yarn on my shoulders, the lifting of a heavy truck, and often unusual speed to keep the mules in my section running. The farm work did not appear to have strengthened me very decidedly. I had to stagger under my loads the same as ever. I wondered how long I should last at that sort of work, for if I could not do that work the overseer would never promote me to a spinner, where I could earn a skilled worker's wage. I was now near my

nineteenth birthday, and I had to be thinking about my future. I wanted to do a man's work now, in a man's way, for a man's wage. I learned with alarm, too, that I was getting past the age when young men enter college, and there I was, without even a *common school education!* Once more the gloom of the mill settled down on me. The old despair gripped me.

I did find companionship in my ambitions, now that I had left the gang. Pat Carroll, an Irishman, wanted to go to college also. He was far past me in the amount of schooling he had enjoyed, for by patient application to night school in the winter, he had entered upon High School studies. There was Harry Lea, an Englishman, who was even further advanced than was Pat Carroll. Harry liked big words, and had tongue-tiring sentences of them, which created rare fun whenever he cared to sputter them for us. Harry had a very original mind, did not care much for society, and lived quite a thoughtful life.

These two aided me with knotty problems in arithmetic and grammar. But it was not often that I had time to spend with them now that my work was more strenuous and wearing than before.

Harry was attending a private evening school

and invited me to the annual graduation. I asked him if there would be any "style" to it, thereby meaning fancy dress and well-educated, society people.

"Oh," said Harry, "there will be men in evening dress, swallow tails, you know, and some women who talk nice. If they talk to you, just talk up the weather. Society people are always doing that!"

The graduation was held in one of the lecture halls of the Y. M. C. A. I sat in my place, watching with rapt eyes the speakers, the fluent speakers who had such an education! The principal was a college man. Him I watched with veritable worship. He had reached the goal I craved so eagerly, so vainly to reach. I wondered at the time if he felt bigger than other people because he had a college degree! When the program neared its end, a young man was announced to read an essay, the principal stating that the young man had been *studying English but five months*, and saying it so emphatically that I thought the reader must be a green Swede, so I marvelled greatly when the fluent diction sounded on my ears, for I did not hear a single sound with a Swedish accent to it!

One Monday morning there was a notice posted in the mill to the effect that an evening school of design would be opened in the Textile School.

I inquired about it, and found that I could learn all sorts of artistic designing — wall-paper, book, and cloth, free of tuition. "Here's my chance," I thought. "I can learn a trade that will pay well, get me out of the mill, and not be too much of a tax on what little strength the mill has left me." So I went joyously "up city," and entered the splendid building used as a Textile College. I enrolled at the office and was assigned to a classroom.

I went to my task joyfully with dreams of future success, for I liked drawing. Had I not traced newspaper pictures ever since I was a small boy? Were not the white-painted walls of the mills I had worked in decorated with cow-boys, rustic pictures, and Indian's heads, drawn by my pencil?

Three nights a week I walked back and forth to the Textile School, tired, but ambitious to make the most of my great opportunity. Week by week I went through various lessons until I began to design wall-papers with water-color and to make book-cover designs on which I prided myself, and on which my teacher complimented me.

Then my eyes began to weaken under the glare of the lights, and the long strain they had been under during the day, through staring at cotton threads and the fatigue of long hours

under the mill lights. My conventionalized leaves and flowers, my water-lily book designs, my tracings for Scotch plaids — all grew hazy, jumpy, distorted, and my brush fell from a weary clutch. In dismal submission I had to give up that ambition. The mill was bound to have me. What was the use of fighting against it?

But now that the direction had been indicated by the Textile School, I thought that I might learn to draw in my spare time, and outside regular class rooms, for just then a Correspondence School agent came to me and offered me instruction in that line at a very reasonable rate. I enrolled myself, and thought that with the choice of my hours of study I could readily learn the art of designing. But a few evenings at elementary scribbling and a few dollars for advance lessons took away my courage. The whole thing seemed a blind leading. I cut off the lessons and gave up in utter despair.

Then, one night, as I was on my way from work, I was met near our house by a young lad who ran up to me, stopped abruptly, almost poked his finger in my eye as he called, derisively: "Aw, yer aunt's been arrested fer being drunk! She was lugged off in a hurry-up! Aw, yer aunt's got jugged! Shame on yer! shame on yer!"

I ran home at that, incredulous, but found the house deserted. Then I knew that it was true. I lay on the bed and cried my eyes sore in great misery, with the bottom gone out of the world.

My uncle had been called to investigate the matter. He came home and said that nothing could be done until morning, so we sat up to the table and made out as best we could with a supper.

The next morning I went to uncle's overseer with a note to the effect that he would be unable to be at work that morning. The mill-boys, who had passed the news around, met me and in indelicate haste referred to my misfortune, saying, "Goin' to the trial, Priddy," and, "What did yer have to eat last night, Priddy — tripe on a skewer?" I worked apart that day, as if interdicted from decent society. My aunt's shame was mine, perhaps in a greater measure.

On my return home that night I found my foster parents awaiting me with smiles on their faces.

"Al," said my aunt, in tears, "I want you to forgive me. I've turned over a new leaf. Both of us have. Uncle and I have been to the city mission and have taken the pledge. The judge wasn't hard on me. He sent us there. We've

put you to shame often enough and are sorry for it. You're to have a better home, and we'll get along famously after this. Maybe it's all been for the best, lad; don't cry." And from the new, inspiring light in her eyes I could tell that she meant every word, and I thanked God in my heart for the experience that had made such words possible — strange words on my aunt's lips.

Chapter XIX. A Reduction in Wages, Cart-tail Oratory, a Big Strike, and the Joys and Sufferings thereof

Chapter XIX. A Reduction in Wages, Cart-tail Oratory, a big Strike, and the Joys and Sufferings thereof.

IN January of that year forty thousand mill operatives went on strike. I belonged to the union and had a voice in the preparations for the strike. The manufacturers wanted to reduce our wages ten per cent. Word was passed around the mule-room that there was to be a stubborn fight, and that every union member ought to be on hand at the next regular meeting, when a vote was to be taken which would be our answer to the officials.

Our union headquarters were then in a long, narrow room in one of the business blocks, lighted by smoky oil lamps. The room was crowded when the meeting was called to order. The men were allowed to declare their feelings in speeches.

"Th' miserly manufacturers," growled Hal Linwood, a bow-legged Socialist, "they never knows when they are well off, they dunno. Little enough we gets now, and worse off we'll be if they slices our wages at the rate they would go. It ain't just, and never will be just till we div —"

"Order!" shouted the chairman. "This here isn't no Socialist meeting. What the man said at first is all right, though."

"Hear! hear!" roared the crowd.

Linwood represented the prevailing opinion, and when the vote was taken we declared in favor of a strike by a large majority. Messengers were coming in from the other meetings, and we saw that a general strike would be effected.

The situation was serious, though, for we were in the heart of winter, the most inconvenient time for a strike.

I looked forward to it without any scruples, for it meant a chance for me to rest. I had been given no vacations either in winter or summer, and I felt that one was certainly due me.

I experienced a guilty feeling when I passed the silent mills the next Monday morning. I felt as if I were breaking some great, authoritative law. It was the same feeling I always experienced when I stayed away from work, even for a day. I always avoided passing the

mill for fear the overseer would run out and drag me in to work.

During the early stages of the strike we were constantly in our strike headquarters, getting news and appointing committees. Collectors were sent out to other cities to take up contributions. Mass-meetings were held in the city hall, and we were addressed by Mr. Gompers and other labor leaders. Even in the public parks incendiary meetings were common, and wild-eyed orators called us to resistance — from the tail end of a cart.

The position of collector was eagerly sought, for to most of the men it offered a higher wage than could be earned in the mill. It also meant travel, dinners, and a good percentage of the collections. When I told my uncle that a man named Chad was earning more money as a collector than he could earn as a spinner, I was angrily told to mind my own business.

In fact, the conduct of the strike, as I looked on it from behind the scenes, was simply a political enterprise. Our leader kept urging us to resist. He himself was not working in the mill, but was getting his money from our dues. Several of our meetings were no more than drinking bouts. The strike manager, who conducted our part in it, elected his closest friends to important offices which offered good remuneration.

I have been to football games when the home team knew that it was beaten at the start, and yet the captain has pounded his men and said: "Come on, boys, we've got them whipped." That sort of artificial courage was supplied us by our leaders. Perhaps it was necessary; for the most of us were hungry, our clothes were worn, and the fire at home had to be kept low. The grocers would not give us credit, and the winter was cold. But the leaders grinned at us, pounded the gavel on the table, and shouted: "This is a fight for right, men. We've got the right end of the stick. Keep together and we'll come out all right!"

At one of the meetings, picketing committees were appointed, with specific instructions to do all in their power to prevent "scabs" from going into the mills. We boys were invited to special meetings, where we were treated to tobacco by the men and lectured on the ethics of the "scabbing system."

"Just think, lads, here are those that would step in and take your work. Think of it! That's just what they'd do! Take the bread right out of your mouths, and when the strike is done, you wouldn't have no work at all to go to. It's criminal, and you mustn't let it pass. Fight, and fight hard. A 'scab's' not human. Don't be afraid to fight him by fair means or

foul. And then, too, the manufacturers have the police and the judges and the governor on their side, because they are moneyed men! They will try to drive us off the streets so that we can't show how strong we are. Look out for the 'scabs'!"

His words came true, in part. The state police were called, several strikers were arrested, and given the full penalty for disorderly conduct and assault. We were not allowed to congregate on the street corners. The police followed every crowd.

These precautions intensified the anger of the strikers. Strike headquarters, in which we could meet and pass the day in social ways, were opened in vacant stores. Here we came in the morning and stayed through the day, playing cards, checkers, and talking over the strike.

In regard to newspapers, there was a prevailing opinion among us that the Boston *Journal* alone favored our side, so we bought it to the exclusion of all other dailies. Against the Boston *Transcript* there was a general antipathy. I liked to read it, but my uncle spoke against it.

"I don't want anybody under my roof reading the paper that is owned hand and foot by our enemies," he argued, and I saw that I had given him great offense.

The Boston papers sent their official photographers to take our pictures. I posed, along with several of my friends, before our headquarters, and had the pleasure of seeing the picture in the paper under some such caption as "A group of striking back-boys."

I did not suffer during the strike. I had a splendid time of it. While the snow was on the ground I obtained a position as a sweeper in one of the theaters, and I spent nearly every day for a while at matinées and evening performances. The strike went on into the early part of May, and, when the snow had gone, I went out with a little wagon — picked coal and gathered junk. Through these activities I really earned more spending money than I ever received for working in the mill. I rather enjoyed the situation, and could not understand at the time how people could say they wanted it to end.

Before it did end, the state police withdrew, and we went on guard once more at the mill gates on watch for "strike-breakers."

We boys made exciting work of this, encouraged by our elders. I recall one little man and his wife, who did not believe in unions or strikes. They did have a greed for money, and they had plenty of it invested in tenements. They had no children to support. They were,

however, among the first to try to break the strike in our mill. Popular antipathy broke with direful menace upon their heads. Every night a horde of neighbors — men, women, boys, and girls — escorted them home from their work, and followed them back to the mill gates every morning. The women among us were the most violent. "Big Emily," a brawny woman, once brought her fist down on the little man's head with this malediction: "Curse ye! ye robber o' hones' men's food! Curse ye! and may ye come to want, thief!" The poor man had to take the insult, for the flicker of an eye meant a mobbing. His wife was tripped by boys and mud was plastered on her face. The pettiest and the meanest annoyances were devised and ruthlessly carried into effect, while the strike-breaking couple marched with the set of their faces toward home.

Even the walls of their house could not protect them from the menace of the mob. One of the strikers rented the lower floor of their house, and one night, when we had followed them to the gate, he invited us into the basement, produced an accordion, and started a merry dance, which lasted well into the night.

The return of the swallows brought an end to the strike. We boys resolved to vote against

a return, for the May days promised joyous outdoor life. But the men and women were broken in spirit and heavily in debt, and a return was voted. We had fought four long months and lost.

Chapter XX. My Steam Cooker goes wrong. I go to Newport for Enlistment on a Training-ship

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I RETURNED to the mill with the feelings of an escaped convict who has been returned to his cell after a day of freedom. My uncle found that he had been put on the black-list, and consequently would not be able to obtain work in any mill in the city. I was allowed to take up a new position as "doffer." This meant an advance in wages, but I knew that I was not physically equal to it. There was nothing for me to do, however, but accept, for there was a waiting line at the lower end of the room and the overseer was not a man who offered things twice.

The mill was getting more and more beyond me. It had taken my strength and I was incapable of a man's work, as a man's work

went in the mule-room. I resolved, then, to break my aunt's domination, leave the mill, and earn my own way with the first thing that offered itself outside the mill.

About this time I read of a young fellow who earned large profits by selling steam cookers. I wrote to the firm, borrowed five dollars, and obtained a sample and a territory. This cooker consisted of five compartments which fitted in each other like a nest of boxes. The sample was on such a small scale that great care had to be exercised in a demonstration of it. I practised faithfully on it for a few evenings, tried to sell one to my aunt, and then resolved to take a day's holiday and attempt a few sales. One cooker would yield a good day's pay. I resolved to abide by instructions and persevere.

So I started out one afternoon, full of hope, assured that the cooker would sell on sight and that my way out of the mill had come. I did not then think that personal appearance had everything to do with successful salesmanship. I did not stop to think that a tall, bony, red-eyed youth, with a front tooth missing and wearing trousers which bagged at the knees, whose coat sleeves were just high enough to show that he had never worn a pair of cuffs in his life — I did not stop to think that he would invite laughter and ridicule on his head. I

faced the situation seriously and earnestly, and I expected the same consideration from the world.

I walked cheerfully to a wealthy portion of the town, in a district where I was certain they would like to see my wonderful steam cooker. In great, gulping patience I waited for an answer to my ring before a very aristocratic house. I arranged my "patter" and determined that everything should go on smoothly so far as my talent was concerned.

The lady of the house appeared and I stated my business. She did not invite me into her house. I exposed my wonderful machine, pulled it apart, explained how she could cook cabbages, puddings, and meats at one and the same time. I expatiated on the superiority of steam-cooked foods, and implied that she could not intelligently keep house and maintain a reputation as a cook unless she used the steam cooker. She bore my "patter" with great patience, and must have smiled at my cockney dialect, of which I was blissfully ignorant.

I had reached that part of the demonstration where the several sections had to be fitted into each other, and had put the first two sections in place and told what foods could be cooked in them, when I came to grief at the third section. It stuck, and in spite of the beads of perspiration which rolled down my face and a vain attempt

to keep up the "patter," I could not unfasten it until I had turned the wonderful cooker upside down, a proceeding which would have emptied the beans and puddings in practical use. The woman was very kindly, and she dismissed me with cordial words. But I went down those steps chagrined and fully persuaded that I must stay in the mill.

My uncle was now earning his living by keeping another store. He and my aunt were spending the profits in a next-door saloon. My home life had not improved.

Then I remembered the novels I had read; some of them, an "Army and Navy Series," had treated of apprentice life in the navy. I knew that Newport was the recruiting station, and I resolved to enlist in the navy.

When I proposed the matter to my aunt, she agreed to let me go. The following morning I obtained a day's holiday and went on the electric cars to the noted seaport town.

This trip abroad, with its opportunities to see that there were people who did other things besides work in the mill, and with its freedom and sunshine, made me more desperate than ever to leave the mill. I was like the Pilgrim in the first chapter of Bunyan's allegory, running from the City of Destruction, fingers in ears, calling "Life, Life!"

I walked around Newport cliffs and touched the gateways of the palaces which front the famous walk. I reveled in the shimmer of the sea and the fragrance of shrubs and flowers. This was life and the world! I must get out in it; take my place daily in it, and live the life of a Man. God made the sun and the fragrant air; he made the flowers and created health. That was due me, because it was not my sin, but that of my elders, which had shut me out of it through my boyhood. These were some of the thoughts uppermost in my mind. I walked the narrow streets and broad avenues — places which I had read of and had never hoped to see. If I had to return to the mill, I could say that I had seen so much of the outside world, at least!

After I had watched the departure of some torpedo-boats in the direction of a gray-fronted fort across the bay, I hurried in the direction of the naval college to see if Uncle Sam would give me the chance to leave the mill which others had denied.

I passed a training-ship with its housed deck. I walked along past drill grounds and barracks and entered a quiet office. With a beating heart I announced to the attendant that I had come to offer myself for enlistment in the training-school. He led me into a large,

dim room to a group of uniformed officers. They asked me a few questions, tested me with bits of colored wool, and then I was commanded to disrobe.

The remainder of the examination must have been exceedingly perfunctory, for the scales registered only one hundred and eighteen pounds and I stood five feet eleven inches in my bare feet. That was enough to exclude me, but they went on with the tests, examining my teeth (the front one was missing), pounding my chest, and testing the beat of my heart. No comments were made, and after I had dressed again I was sent to an anteroom and told to wait their decision.

For a few long minutes I sat in the silent room wondering what would be the decision. I was optimistic enough to plan what I would do if I should enter the navy. I should — here the attendant came, offered me a tiny card, and without a word bowed me to the door. I knew then that I had been refused. I walked through the yard in a daze. When I reached the city, I took heart to read the card they had given me. I recall that it read thus simply: "REFUSED. Defective teeth. Cardia —" Uncle Sam did not want to give me a chance!

Chapter XXI. The Ichabod of Mule-rooms, some Drastic Musing, College at my Finger-tips, the Mill People wait to let me pass, and I am Waved into the World by a Blind Woman

Chapter XXI. The Ichabod of Mule-rooms, some Drastic Musing, College at my Finger-tips, the Mill People wait to let me pass, and I am Waved into the World by a Blind Woman

ON my return from Newport I went to work in one of the oldest mills in the city. The "mules" were in a gloomy basement — a crowded, dim, and very dirty place to work in. It was the Ichabod of mule-rooms, with every trace of glory gone. The machinery was obsolete and had to be helped along with monkey-wrenches, new parts, and constant, nerve-wearing watchfulness. The alleys were so narrow that the back-boys had to edge in between the frames; and expanded chest often meant a destructive rubbing on bobbins and

a breaking of threads. It always seemed to me that this room was reserved by the corporation to work off its veteran spinners and its unreliable ones, its veteran machinery, and its bad-tempered, ineffective bosses. This mule-room was the byword among the spinners at that end of the city. A man hung his head when he had to tell another that he was working in it; for it generally was his testimony to his fellows that he was in the last ditch. Spinners graduated from that room into scrubbing or oiling.

The personnel of this room was always changing; but its prevailing character remained the same: a dull-eyed, drunken set of men, a loafing, vicious set of young fellows who worked a week and loafed three.

I chose to work in that place because it was my first opportunity for an advance from doffing to "joiner." A "joiner" is one who shares with another the operation of a pair of mules — a semi-spinner. The pay is divided, and the work is portioned off between the two. I had been working toward this position for six years and a half, and now it had come, even in that miserable room, I was eager to see how I should manage.

But, oh, the mockery and vanity of all efforts, even my wild ones, to master one of those machines! The lurching, halting, snap-

ping things could not be mastered Threads snapped faster than I could fasten them. One tie and two breaks, two ties and three breaks, along the row of glistening spindles, until there were so many broken threads that I had to stop the mule to catch up. And every stop meant the stoppage of wages, and the longer a thread stayed broken, the less I was earning; and on top of that, the bosses swore at us for stopping at all. I should have stopped work then and there — it would have been the sensible thing to do — but I was no loafer, and I was trying to make good in this new work — the end of a long desire. The other "joiners" and spinners did not try to keep at it. They gave up the work as soon as they discovered how useless it was to try to make a decent wage from the worn-out machines. Only myself and a few poor men who were there because they could not get any better place stayed on and fought the one-sided fight. Every time the machinery broke — and breaks were constant— the machinist grumbled, and took his own time in coming with his wrenches.

The physical and mental reaction of all this upon me was most woeful. My muscles grew numb under the excessive pressure on them, so much so that I often stood still when the threads were snapping about me and looked on them as

if I had never seen a broken thread before. Or I would suddenly stop in my wild dashes this way and that in the mending of threads and look dazedly about, feel a stifling half-sob coming to my throat, and my lips would tremble under the misery and hopelessness of it all. My only consolation, and very poor, too, lay in the clock. At six o'clock it would all end for a few hours at least, and I could get out of it all. But when you watch the clock under those circumstances, an hour becomes two, and one day two days. So the labor was, after all, a wild frenzy, a race and a stab and a sob for ten and a half hours! I can never think of it as anything more.

Some of my work-fellows in that room were sent to jail for assault, petty thieving, and drunkenness. I used to think about them, in the jail, doing light work under healthy conditions, even though they were paying penalties for lawlessness, but I, who had done no crime, had to have ten hours and a half of that despairing contest with a machine. How much better to be sewing overalls or making brooms in a jail! I had to stay in the house at night in order to be thoroughly rested for the next day's work. I had no liberty.

And, added to all this, there was the constant depressive contact with unsympathetic and

foul-mouthed desecrators of ambition. Those who knew me in that room were aware that I was trying to avoid every degenerative and impure act. Some of them passed word around also that I was attending such and such a church! They came to the end of the mule, when the boss chanced not to be around, and, in a huddled group, stood at my elbows, where I had work to do, and put on their dirty lips the foulest vocabulary that ever stained foul air.

Then one day there came a flash which clearly lighted up everything. "Why are you going through this wild, unequal labor in this dull room day by day! Why? Do you absolutely have to do it? Are others keeping at it, as you? Why, why, why?" each one bigger than its fellow, made me meet every fact squarely. "To what end all this?"

My labor was helping to buy beer at home! I was giving up all my wage to my aunt, and getting back a little spending money. I had fifteen cents in the bank at the time. I did not *have* to overstrain myself as I was doing. I *had* the privilege of giving up my work at any moment I chose. I was no slave to such conditions. No man could drive me to such tasks. Giving up the work only meant a scolding from my aunt and a little going about among other mills to find another, and perhaps

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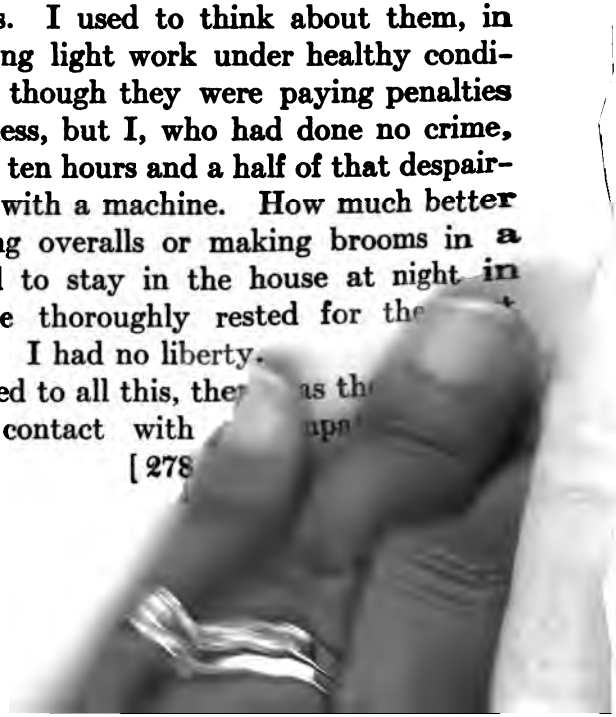

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Then one day there came a flash which nearly lighted up everything. "Why are you going through this wild, menial labor in this mill room day by day? Why? Do you absolutely have to do it? Are others keeping it from you? Why, why, why?" each one bigger than its fellow, made me next [illegible] act. "To what end at last?"

My labor was becoming to my [illegible]: I was giving up all my wage to my [illegible] and getting back a little spending money — [illegible] fifteen cents in the week at the time. I did not *have* to overstrain myself [illegible] the privilege of [illegible] moment I chose [illegible] conditions. No [illegible] tasks. Giving [illegible] scolding from my [illegible] among other mil[illegible]

better, position. This was a new thought to me—that I could leave my work when I wanted; that I might be given work too hard for me.

Previously I had worked on the supposition that whatever was given me *ought* to be done at all costs; that the *mill* was the measure of a man, and not *man* the measure of the mill. I had always looked upon my work as a test of my moral capacity; that any refusal to work, even when it was harder than I could bear, was a denial of my moral rights. But now the worm of conscience was boring through me. Why should I, at twenty years of age, not be entitled to what I earned, to spend on my education, instead of its being spent on my aunt's appetite for intoxicants?

Then, too, why should I have to work with people who had no moral or mental sympathy with me? Was five dollars and seventy-five cents, my pay for the first week in that gloomy room, worth it? Assuredly not.

But, then, what could I do outside of the mill? I had done nothing else but work in the mill and spend a little time on a farm. If I left the mill at so late a time, left all the technical knowledge I had gathered while I had been going through it, should I be doing the best thing for my future? There seemed nothing in the future from the mill, for, as I have shown,

I had not the strength to cope with more difficult tasks than those that then faced me. Probably if I got out of doors, in some open-air work, I should gain strength and be able to make progress in some other line of work. But I had been trying for that, and nothing had come. What then?

Then the greatest light of all came — flooded me. *Leave the mill at any cost!* Stop right where I was; quibble no more, offend all, risk all, but *get away from the mill!* It was all so simple after all! Why had I not worked it out before? *Leave home! Have all I earned to save for my education!* That was my emancipation proclamation, and I started to follow it.

First of all, I went to the overseer in that dingy room and told him frankly that the work he had given me to do was too hard for me. I could not keep it up. I also told him I did not care to leave just then, but, if he had any easier work in the room — doffing, for instance — I should like to continue. He did not receive this declaration with any expression of reproach, as I had expected, but said simply: "You go to work back-boying on those first three mules. You'll make as much money by it as at anything in here."

This first break made, how easily all others followed, as if they had been waiting around all

the time! It was just at this time that I met a young fellow who had come back to the city to spend his vacation from study at a university in the Middle West. To him I told all my thoughts concerning getting away from the mill. I said: "I wonder if I went out where you go to college, and worked at something for a time, just to be away from mills, whether in time I might not have money enough on hand to be able to start on *my* way towards an education?

"How much do you think you would have to save?" he asked, smilingly.

"Why — why, hundreds of dollars, isn't it?"

"Do you think so, Al?"

"Why, certainly."

"And how long would you work to save up?"

"Oh," I replied, "that depends upon what I get to do and how much I could put by."

"Suppose, Al, that you could go right out and start right in with school at the university — it has a preparatory course — and work your way along, what would you say?"

"You mean, jump right in now, this year?"

He nodded.

"But it's all I can do to board and clothe myself by working hard in the mill. I couldn't by any means work hard enough to pay for going through a school."

"How much would you be willing to — oh, Al, you're all wrong about the cost. I tell you, old fellow, you can get through a year at my place on a hundred dollars: board, tuition—"

"What's that?"

"Teaching and room and heat. All the rest of your expenses won't amount to over fifty dollars, if you're careful."

I gazed on him, open-mouthed, for I thought he was laughing at me.

"Say — you aren't kidding me, are you? All that is straight — about being so — so cheap?"

"Why, yes, it's all true enough. I think you can manage it too, Al. I'll do my best to speak a word for you. Get ready to go in three weeks, no matter how much money you have. I think you'll be able to get some outside work to do at the university, to work your way through and meet expenses."

"Well," I said, "I sha'n't be sorry even if I don't get a chance at the school for a while, you know. If I could only get something to do *near* there, my chance might come later. I shouldn't be any worse off than I am here. I can earn my living at something, don't you think so?"

"Why, yes, I do; but I think you will have a chance at the school without having to wait."

"Oh, I can hardly believe that," I exclaimed for sheer joy.

"But you can make all your plans for it, just the same," said my friend with confidence.

This new outlook set every strong emotion shouting in me. The world was not dressed in so gray a garb as I had thought. I went home and told my aunt about my new plan. She said:

"You've never asked *me* if you could go!"

"Well, no," I said, "I haven't; and I don't think I need to. I mean to set out for myself, at any rate. It's about time now that I was doing something for myself, don't you think so?"

"I think you're an impudent puppy, that's what!" indignantly cried my aunt.

I told Pat and Harry, and they could hardly believe their own ears; but they urged me to take the chance, for they thought it was a "chance."

My work — all work in the mill — had suddenly taken on a temporary aspect now, a means to a great end and not an end in itself. I could look on it now and feel that I had mastered it at last. The throbbing, jubilant shout of the victor was on my lips now. I saw past those lint-laden rooms, the creaking, whirling pulleys, and the clacking belts; past them,

and everything that the mill meant to me, to a very pleasant new life ahead; one whose ground was holy and on which it was the privilege of but few to walk. I think there must have been a complete effacement of all the lines that had marked my face. For once, I felt sure of myself; sure that all the lines of leading were to mass into one sure road toward a better thing.

My mind was not on my work for the following three weeks. I went about with a dream in my eyes. I know I whistled much and began to lose all respect for those machines which had driven me, in times past, like a chained slave. I even found myself having much pity for all the other men and boys in the mill. I went among them with hesitation, as if I had a secret which, if told, would make them feel like doing what I was about to do.

I had found out from a ticket agency in the city that my fare to the Middle West would cost me about seventeen dollars. I knew that in two weeks, with the week's wage that the mill always kept back and with the seven dollars my Uncle Stanwood had promised to let me have, that I should have my railway fare and incidental expenses, anyway. So there, in the ticket agency, I had the clerk take me, with his pencil, over the route I should later

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take in the cars. It was a wonderful itinerary. I was to see the mountains of New England, the lakes of the border, and to plunge into a new part of the country! It would take me three days. How I stared at the prospect of so much traveling! I obtained time-tables with maps containing the route over the different railways I should ride on during that journey away from the mill. Three days from the cotton mills! That was a thought to make a fellow dance all day without rest.

One day I lay sprawled out at full length in an alley behind a box, so that the overseer might not see me, when Micky Darrett peeped over my shoulders at the maps I had spread out on which I had traced and retraced my great journey with a pencil.

"What yer' doin', Priddy?" said Micky.

"Oh," I announced with studied nonchalance, "just planning out the road I shall take in two weeks. I'm going to college, you know."

"Oh," laughed Micky, "quit yer kiddin' like that! *What* are you doin', really?"

"Just what I said, Micky. I mean it."

"Gee!" gasped the little Irishman; "yer a sporty bluffer, Priddy!"

"But 'tis true, though," I insisted.

"What yer givin'?" growled Micky. "It's only swells goes ter college."

"That's what you think, Micky, but it's God's truth that I go in two weeks and try to make a start."

"Gee!" he gasped; "I allus thought you was poor. You must have got a lot of money saved, all right, all right!"

"That's where you're wrong, Micky. I shall have about three weeks' wages and what my uncle gives me — seven dollars — if he gives it to me at all. That's all I've got to start on."

"You don't stuff that down me, Priddy!" cried Micky, in great disgust, for he hated to be made sport of. "You can't bluff yer uncle."

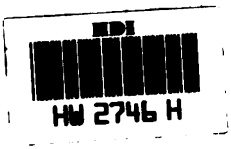
But nevertheless he published all over the room what I had told him, and thereafter I answered many questions about myself and my plans, and had to spend much energy in rebutting the prevalent suspicion that I was "bluffing the room."

Then came my last Saturday in the mill — the last day I have ever spent in the mill. I did my work with a great conscience that day. I don't believe the second hand had to look twice to see if I had done my sweeping well. The spinners had become very friendly, as if my ambition had won respect from them, and even the overseer came to me just before I left the room, took me by the hand, and said: "I wish you the very best of luck, Priddy. Keep to it!"

On Monday morning, at six o'clock, I sat in the train. I had drawn thirteen dollars from the mill, received seven dollars from my uncle, said good-by to my old friends, and paid fifteen dollars and sixty-five cents for a ticket. Aunt Millie, in tears, had kissed me, and had hoped that "I'd do well, very well!" Uncle Stanwood had carried my hand-bag for me to the electric car and had given me good counsel out of his full heart. Now I sat listening to the mill bells and whistles giving their first warning to the workers. "You'll never call for me again, I hope!" I said to myself as I listened. Then the train started, and I glued my face to the window-pane to catch a last glimpse of the city where for seven years I had been trying to get ahead of machinery and had failed. The train went slowly over the grade crossings. I saw the mill crowds at every street, held back by the gates, waiting deferentially while I, who had been one of them last week, was whirled along towards an education. I saw them as I had walked with them — women in shawls and looking always tired, men in rough clothes and with dirty clay pipes prodded in their mouths, and girls in working aprons, and boys, just as I had been, in overalls and undershirts. And I was going away from it all, in spite of everything!

One of my friends was an old woman, stone blind. When I had given her my farewell, she had said: "Al, I'll be at the crossing in front of my house when the train goes by on Monday morning. Look for me. I'll wave my handkerchief when the train passes, lad, and you'll know by that sign that I'm sending you off to make something of yourself!"

We came to the outskirts of the city; the mill crowds had been left, and at last a lonely crossing came, the one for which I had been looking. I had the window open. The train was gathering speed, but I saw the black-garbed blind woman, supported by her daughter, standing near the gates, her eyes fixed ahead, and her handkerchief fluttering, fluttering, as we plunged into the country.



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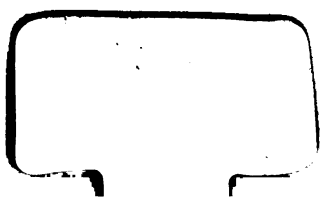
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